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**The magnificent rube**

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# THE MAGNIFICENT RUBE

The life and gaudy times of **TEX RICKARD**

by **CHARLES SAMUELS**

**McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, INC.**

**New York**

**Toronto**

**London**

## **The magnificent rube**

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**For Edith and Jerry**

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# 1

## A stranger in town

WHEN TEX RICKARD, the sports promoter, died at fifty-eight in Miami, on January 6, 1929, the newspapers could not have devoted much more space to his career if he had been President.

In itself this was not too puzzling. Every move Tex had made for years had been front-page news. In addition, his past held for many a storybook quality. Before creating the "million-dollar gate" with Jack Dempsey, Tex had been, successively, a cowboy, a town marshal in Texas, a prospector in the Yukon, a gambling-saloon owner in the Klondike and Nevada gold rushes, a soldier of fortune in South Africa, and a cattle baron in Paraguay.

More difficult to explain than the tremendous press coverage of his death was the widespread emotional reaction of the public. Thousands of men and women who never had known Tex personally mourned him as though he had been their lifelong friend. This first became apparent as his remains were being taken to New York.

In death as in life, George Lewis Rickard traveled in style. His body—in a \$15,000 solid bronze casket that weighed 2,200 pounds—was shipped north in a private railway car hooked onto

the end of the *Havana Special*. This was the fastest train on the Miami-New York run and made only half a dozen stops along the way: at Savannah, Georgia; Florence, South Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, and Wilmington, Delaware. Some of these came at the ghastly early hours of the morning when few persons besides milkmen and round-the-clock rumpots are up and doing. Nevertheless, at each city there were sizable crowds of men and women who had come down to the station to see the private railway car that Tex Rickard was going home in.

The scene was the same at each station. The unknown mourners would slowly walk down the platform and some of them would burst into tears. All would stare at the drawn window shades of the private car and wait patiently until the train started, and wave until it was out of sight.

On the train were most of the sports reporters who had been in Miami to cover Rickard's preparations for the Jack Sharkey-Young Stribling fight. They were intrigued by the crowds at the various stations. But they all agreed when one of them said:

"Wait till we get to New York. Nobody but his family will be crying for Tex there, you'll see."

The train ended its thirty-five-hour journey in New York's Pennsylvania Terminal at 10:22 A.M. (twelve minutes late) on January 8, a Tuesday. It had kept getting colder, of course, as the train continued north, and a front-page headline in the *New York Times* that day read:

COLD NUMBS CITY:  
TO CONTINUE TODAY

Yet in the station hundreds of men were crowded along a railing from which they could look down and see the promoter's bronze casket being carried off the private car to an electric truck on the platform.

It was the same thing on the street outside. All along Eighth Avenue crowds were waiting on both curbs of the sixteen blocks to Madison Square Garden. Tex was to lie in state there, in the vast sports barn he had built and turned into a gold mine.

The funeral was scheduled for two in the afternoon next day,

and it had been announced that the public would be permitted to view the remains during the morning. But this plan was changed, and the afternoon newspapers published the information that all who wished to pass by the bier could do so between six and nine that evening.

The temperature did not rise above 20 degrees that day, but a crowd started to gather outside the Garden early in the afternoon, and by four o'clock there were 700 persons waiting in line.

"New York is a town whose people would not cross the street to see any man in his coffin," the *Sun's* Edwin C. Hill wrote. "But they came, the people who had been waiting, and they were of every sort and degree. As the hours passed, one was to see actresses in sable and ermine, little stenographers, women of society, servant maids, some of the six hundred millionaires that Tex liked to talk about so much, riffraff of the boxing game, bankers, gunmen, owners of department stores and dope sellers, artists, playwrights, journalists, vagabonds, city officials, clerks, day laborers in their stained blue jeans. There were without doubt men wanted by the law in that amazing and heterogeneous double line, but it seemed that they, like the men who keep the law, had that equal admiration and respect that Rickard seemed able to draw from all classes of the human animal. . . ." It was a bizarre sight—"Tex lying in his bower-covered coffin in that high, bare auditorium under the brilliant arc lights he had used on fight nights," and fifteen thousand persons slowly filing past in two lines, one on each side of the casket. At the last moment the Garden management decided to keep the doors open for an additional two hours so that as many as possible could be admitted. But at eleven o'clock there were hundreds still in line outside, stamping their feet and slapping their half-frozen hands together. On seeing the doors being closed some of the men rushed forward and tried to break through the police lines.

The next day nine thousand more people attended the funeral rites. Tex Rickard for years had not been much of a churchgoing man, and after a considerable discussion it was decided that a Baptist clergyman, an Episcopalian clergyman, a Catholic lawyer, and a Jewish judge should in turn recommend him to the safe-keeping of God.

Courtenay (Brick) Terrett, the well-known reporter, was so impressed by this eminent quartet's flowery oratory that he compared the rites to a service "for an archbishop in the cathedral he had built."

Also present that day was every size and degree of fighter who had worked for Tex. Champions and ex-champions were there, title contenders, main-eventers, the battered old club fighters, and preliminary boys. Many of them were down on their knees, crying without shame for him, praying for him.

Tears were streaming down the cheeks of Jack Dempsey, most savage ring killer of them all. "I've lost the best friend I ever had," he said. Other old champions seemed to feel the same way: "Paralyzing Paul" Berlenbach, the light heavyweight; Jack Britton, the best boxer ever in the welterweight class; Joe Lynch, the bantam.

Jack Sharkey, the Boston heavyweight whom Tex had signed to fight Young Stribling in Miami, was also there. Sharkey told Dan Parker, the sports columnist, "That man isn't in his grave yet, and already they're trying to break my contract."

Three hundred patrolmen and mounted policemen were assigned to maintain order around the Garden. They had their hands full. The crowd in the street was an immovable mass that had backed up traffic from Eighth Avenue all the way to Sixth.

Tex's fans were also crowded behind every window in nearby buildings, were standing along the edges of the roofs. Others had climbed to the tops of the stalled trolley cars.

The most difficult moment for the police came when the casket of the promoter reached the street. Then there was a surge forward, but the cops managed to hold their lines intact.

If Tex could have sat up in his coffin, he would have looked around at all of them trying to get near him, plaguing the cops, and uttered his favorite expression:

"I never seed nothing like it!"

And, if one excludes public officials, it is difficult to recall more than three other funerals of celebrities in New York during the past half century which caused such widespread, sincere sorrow. There was, of course, the hysterical exhibition put on by fifty

thousand women when Rudolph Valentino died. Yet that was a show whipped up by press agents and the editors of *The Graphic*, a tabloid newspaper now defunct, for their own ghoulish purposes.

But one day in May, 1916, a hundred thousand Jews packed their ghetto streets, wailing in despair and wringing their hands as the flower-bedecked coffin of Sholom Aleichem, the Yiddish Mark Twain, went past. There was the same sort of demonstration by the Negroes of Harlem—in 1927 when Florence Mills died, and once again more recently when Bojangles Bill Robinson died.

Each of these three artists, however, had long been a symbol and a source of strength to his underprivileged race. To Jews the news that Sholom Aleichem was dead was like hearing that laughter itself had been banished from the world. Negroes felt the same way about Miss Mills, who never sang a song without making them feel she was singing it for and with all of them. Just as Bojangles Robinson, dancing in the white man's world, impudently as the wind, forwards, backwards, upstairs, downstairs, on floors and tables and chairs, and on top of the Yankee dugout, was dancing with all of them.

But what did Tex Rickard, the showman, symbolize to those thousands of strangers that they should feel a sense of personal loss? What had brought him so close to them? No man could remember such a thing happening to any other showman.

A good many of these have fluttered the heart of New York since 1835 when Phineas T. Barnum first set up shop there with Joyce Heth, the Negro slave whom he falsely claimed had been George Washington's nurse and was now 160 years old. Just in the past half century there have been, including Rickard, half a dozen truly great ones: Oscar Hammerstein I, George M. Cohan, David Belasco, Florenz, Ziegfeld, Jr., and George C. Tilyou.

There is one striking difference between Tex Rickard and the other five. Each of the others was either a born slicker or swiftly developed an aptitude for hornswoggling that approached genius.

Tex Rickard, who never lived in a city until he was forty, was a hick when he arrived in New York, and he never changed. It is only fair to add that he was one of the most extraordinary hayseeds since Abe Lincoln. In one respect, he outclassed Lincoln; this by

remaining honest in the two most larcenous professions ever known: gambling and fight promoting. Lincoln, after all, merely had to cope with lawyers and politicians.

There was something so heart-warming about Tex that few who knew him found it possible to dislike him. But those who most deeply admired Rickard were frequently upset by his gullibility.

Gene Fowler, who was Rickard's press agent for a time, frequently was startled by his boss's custom of buying stock in non-existent mines, real estate 60 fathoms below sea level, unworkable inventions, and every other conceivable sort of phony offering.

Along with the rest of the Broadway mob, Fowler could not see how Rickard could have run successful gambling houses for years if he was unable to detect phonies and thieves at a glance. Some of the boys became convinced that Tex must believe in miracles.

That was a good guess.

Rickard believed in miracles because he had seen them happen. Again and again he had watched storekeepers in Circle City, Alaska, and in Dawson and Nome get rich because they had had the charity to stake some frostbitten, louse-ridden, half-dead old guy to a winter's grub for a half share of his claim. He had seen wide-eyed boys who had never been off their mothers' apron strings stumble out into the wilderness and strike it rich. As a saloon-keeper, Tex himself had scores of times trusted drunks who would have sold their wives' dentures for a shot of rotgut whisky. And more often than not he got his money back, dollar for dollar. He had gambled on the honor of thieves, and that also had paid off.

Of course, this was before he entered the bewildering stone, steel, and glass jungle of New York. It is doubtful whether Tex ever did understand many of the New Yorkers he met during his years there. He considered himself a son of luck to be king of a business for which he never lost his enthusiasm, and nobody ever loved a building more than he did his Madison Square Garden. It was as though he had laid every brick in its walls and nailed down each of its 18,903 seats.

Nevertheless, more often than not, he seemed a lost and lonely soul. He needed the carefully tailored suits he wore, and the Havana cigar and gold-headed cane which were his trade-mark. But



they did not fool anyone. All the expensive clothes did for him was to make him look like a hick whose idea of sartorial elegance had not changed since he first saw a midway talker at a carnival.

But he was shrewd enough. Jack Hurley, the most intelligent of all living fight managers, says, "I never saw such piercing eyes as Rickard's. They seemed to bore right through you. And when you wanted to make a deal with him for your fighter, he was very crafty, very cunning. Also very elusive. It was most difficult to pin him down on terms. But once he agreed to an arrangement, that was it. You didn't need a contract with Tex Rickard. His word was always enough."

The sort of business boxing is clearly implied, of course, in Mr. Hurley's astonishment at such square dealing. Also in a comment made by the late Joe Humphreys, the famous leather-lunged announcer who had once been co-manager of Terrible Terry McGovern.

"Rickard was not so smart," said Joe Humphreys shortly before his own death, "because he couldn't dope out any elaborate scheme for ticket grafting. I can't remember another promoter—offhand anyway—about who I would say such a thing."

However, Mr. Hurley was right. Shrewd Tex was, though all his early scheming and calculating had been done in quite a different sort of free-wheeling society from the one he encountered in either boxing circles or New York itself.

Where he came from, men did not drink at a bar with you, shoulder to shoulder, while figuring out how to double-cross you. And what a man did was always more important than anything he said. The Big Towners' equivocal attitudes toward ethics in business and social life, and their wondrous and wizardlike ways with money baffled him in equal degree.

Tex was very proud of the "six hundred millionaires" who were stockholders in the Madison Square Garden Corporation. But once, after a sensationally successful year, he asked a sports writer: "How is it that I get all the publicity, and those respectable, churchgoing business fellers end up with the profits?"

There was considerable irony, incidentally, in that magnificent funeral. Though the public was unaware of it, Rickard, just before he died, had been eased, squeezed, and bounced out of Madison

Square Garden, which everyone including Tex regarded as his personal domain.

One clue to the widespread grief when Tex died may lie in a rite he performed at the doors of the Garden. Each evening at the same time, Tex got ten to twenty dollars' worth of silver from the box office. Then he would stand there in the lobby, handing out quarters and half dollars to all comers—the brokes and the drunks, the hoppers, the old beggar women, and the horse players. Most of them were regulars who came back every night. But all of them were people whom the city had broken in one way or another.

Any night and every night it was something to see them come creeping up to him, one by one, for the pieces of silver from the hand of this good and great friend whose name was always in the papers; creeping up to the edge of light, to the fringe of the world where there was applause and laughter and fun, and a man or woman could think of something besides where the next meal, or drink, or shot, was coming from.

For each of them the handout was the one thing that made it possible to go on living—and hoping a little—for one more day.

It was the only way Tex, the nonchurchgoer, could think of to thank God each night for helping him avoid the fate of those little sad and twisted people. Not being a reflective man, Tex possibly never realized himself how mighty a debt of gratitude he felt to Him whom the fight mob calls with impartial banality “the Big Guy upstairs” and “the greatest Referee of them all.”

None of this, of course, fully explains his extraordinary funeral. That explanation, though, may lie in something as simple as a universal conviction that Tex Rickard was unique, and there would never be another like him.

# 2

## The dime-novel boyhood

ONE ODD THING about Tex Rickard was his inability to make up his mind about where he was born. Sometimes he said it was in Kansas City, Missouri; at other times Kansas City, Kansas. The owner of a Miami dog track once heard Rickard identify Wyandotte, Kansas, as his birthplace. After Tex died the dog-track man hung a Tex Richard memorial plaque bearing this misinformation on the wall of his clubhouse. Tex also frequently shifted the date of his birth from 1870 to 1871 and back again.

His mother, Lucretia, whose presence at the scene is indisputable, always asserted that the great event occurred on January 2, 1871, in her roadside cabin in Clay County, Missouri. He was her first son and second child.

Whenever asked to explain the discrepancy between her son's various accounts of his birth, and her own, Mrs. Rickard said there was so much going on at the time that she didn't wonder that her George Lewis had since become confused about a few of the more prosaic details. For one thing, bullets were flying all about the cabin at the precise moment he came into the world. Between that and the noise made by a sheriff's twenty-six-man

posse thundering past, Mrs. Rickard missed hearing her infant boy's first cry. The posse, as she explained, was in hot pursuit of Jesse James and Frank James, the outlaw sons of Mrs. Zerelda Samuels, who lived on the next farm.

The doctor who delivered Lucretia told her and her husband, Robert Woods Rickard, that he'd met the sheriff and his men on the road. "Somebody tipped him off that Jesse and Frank had spent New Year's on the farm with their folks and were still around the place."

"But the boys got away in time?" asked Mrs. Rickard.

"Don't they always?" said the doctor, winking at her husband. "That's what all that shooting outside was about. But they'll be back."

"So will the sheriff," thought Lucretia, looking down at the baby boy sleeping at her side. And she told herself that if she had anything to say about it her George Lewis would grow up to be law-abiding and peace-loving.

That the supreme showman of violence as a ring spectacle should have been born while hell was breaking loose all around him is a coincidence less curious than at first appears. Clay County, Missouri, is part of that "dark and bloody ground" along the Kansas border where Southern sympathizers, in 1871, six years after the peace at Appomattox Courthouse, had still not given up. There were still frequent bushwhackings, lynchings, and barn burnings on both sides, and scalpings were not unknown. The James boys, along with the Youngers and other Clay County youths, were adding to the hatred and general confusion with their bank robberies and what Northern sympathizers described as cold-blooded killings.

Lucretia Rickard had heard Zerelda's side of the story so often she knew it by heart. According to the mother of Jesse and Frank, they weren't killers or criminals but avenging Robin Hoods.

Despite the price on their heads the James boys came riding home often, particularly on holidays, to see their mother, their sister Susie, and their stepfather, Dr. Reuben Samuels, a farmer-physician.

George Lewis's dad, a millwright who had difficulty making a

living because he was so often ailing, frequently discussed with his wife the advantages of moving to some other part of the country. But that was not easy to manage. Because of Bob Rickard's frequent spells of illness, there was never enough money in the house to justify pulling up stakes.

What convinced the Rickards that their children would be safer growing up almost anywhere else was the famous "tragic incident" next door.

One night, shortly after little George Lewis's fourth birthday, ten Pinkerton men surrounded the Samuels farmhouse. They had been told that the boys were inside, and staked flares around the house to make sure of seeing them as they came out. Then they threw a bomb through a window. (The Pinkertons always insisted later that this was only a flare wrapped up in smoking rags and was tossed in to smoke Jesse James and his brother out of the house.)

If it was a flare it was a highly explosive one. Zerelda kicked the smoking thing into the fireplace and it blew up there, tearing off her arm, killing her eight-year-old son Archie, and injuring Dr. Samuels and a Negro servant.

That was too much for Bob Rickard. Susie James and her husband, Allan Parmer, who had also ridden with Quantrill's Black Flag Brigade, had recently moved to Sherman, Texas, a frontier town where things were said to be humming. After talking it over with Lucretia, Bob Rickard packed her and the children into a covered wagon and headed south. Among other things, he hoped his health would improve in Sherman. But he continued to be sick when he got there. After a year of bitter struggle, he once again packed his family and all his earthly belongings into a covered wagon and moved west to Cambridge, once more following the Parmers and other Missouri neighbors.

Cambridge had been founded but two years before. Like George Lewis's birthplace it was in a county named after Henry Clay, the "Great Pacificator." On the northern border of Texas, it faced the Indian Territory.

Clay County had originally been organized in 1857, but its 109 settlers abandoned their homes there with the start of the Civil War. With the Texas Rangers joining Lee's men and the army

detachments in the area sent north to reinforce the Union army, the pioneers were unable to defend themselves against the attacks of Comanches, Kiowas, and Cheyennes.

There had been houses and stores at Henrietta, a hamlet three miles from Cambridge, but these were burned down by the hostile tribes. The community was not reestablished until 1872, or two years before its neighbor.

However, when the ragged, hungry Rickards arrived, Cambridge already had a school, a church, thirty dwellings, and nine business houses. Five of the business houses were saloons which sold what Texans call "the sweet waters of good nature," "ol' Texas red eye," and "Jim Crow Whisky."

The newcomers settled in a shack across the street from the Allan Parmers' home. But again Bob's health did not improve and neither did the family finances. After he became a promoter in New York, Tex—who was nicknamed Dink as a boy—could scarcely conceal his astonishment when city people told him how they envied him his boyhood. He usually replied, "We didn't complain much in those days," because he did not wish anyone to think he was complaining about it now.

But once he told a newspaper interviewer:

"The hard side of life was an old story to me long before I grew up. I never had any boyhood in the sense that the average boy does today. Circumstances forced me into cutting my own way at a time when most boys are out flying kites and playing marbles. I lived the life most boys imagine they want to live when they read a dime novel."

By the time he was seven, Tex was shining cowboys' boots on Cambridge's one street. One day two of his customers—Tom Gibson and Ike Bernard of the nearby Worsham ranch—decided to have some fun with him. When he was finished shining their boots, they told him they did not intend to pay him, and started to walk off. The little boy stepped off the plank sidewalk into the muddy street. Scooping up a handful of mud, he smeared it all over the boots he had just shined.

His right hand on his forty-five, Ike Bernard watched the boy with amazement. So did Gibson. But they were unable to control themselves for very long, and burst into wild laughter. They told

Dink they had only been teasing him and begged him to shine their boots again. When he finished they each paid him for the two shines and tipped him besides.

Like every other American boy living in the West, Dink worshiped the cowboys whom he saw every day. He liked nothing better than listening for hours on end to old cowboys talking together about the stampedes, terrible storms, and the privations they had survived on the trail. It was a business so tough, they agreed, that only young men could take the day-by-day punishment. Aside from the danger, a fellow sometimes had to work in the saddle forty-eight hours without a break, often without enough food, rubbing tobacco juice in his eyes to keep them open.

This, of course, never stopped a young fellow from dreaming of the day he'd become a cowboy himself. And Dink, Will Slack, Bob Parmer and the other barefooted children of Clay County regularly saw the young cowboys at their most dashing, in the new outfits they had bought before starting on another trip over the trail to Kansas. These outfits consisted, usually, of a high, white, broad-brimmed Stetson, a bandanna, a red or blue shirt with fancy pockets on both sides, California pants and high-heeled boots with silver-inlaid spurs. And there was a rope across each man's saddle and a six-shooter riding his right hip.

Dink Rickard was also an ardent admirer of the James boys. His friend, Bob Parmer, could talk of little except his two notorious uncles. It was Bob Parmer who first told Dink the legend about Jesse never taking his gun belt off, asleep or awake.

When it was learned that the James boys were heading for Henrietta, word would be passed around town that the Parmers' "cousins from Arizona" were on the way. Everybody would hurry home, close the shutters, and peep out at the greatest heroes of the West. Tex remembered admiring Jesse James's beard and the splendid horses he and his men always rode.

Once, thanks to Bob, who hid him behind a door in the Parmer house, Dink was able to look out and see the mighty Jesse plain. Rickard said it was impossible then for him to believe that James could be a killer. "Why," he said, "he kissed his sister, laughed like any young fellow might have, and skipped around her like a man without a worry in the world."

Rickard's favorite story about James was the one in which Jesse caught one of his men during a train robbery drinking from a jug of whisky he had just taken from a passenger in the coach. Whooping to the others to join him, the whisky-loving bandit tilted the jug to his lips just as Jesse strode in.

Jesse gave him one disgusted look, then shot the jug out of his aide's hands. Next he kicked the man through the door, telling him, "If you wanna drink, do it when I tell you. But never let a drop of whisky pass your lips during business hours."

Tex always said his mother had the heart of a lioness. She needed it in Cambridge, living with her ailing husband in an unpainted, overcrowded shack. And now there were four children. Among their neighbors were many other families from Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas who were almost as poor.

But the childhood of no poor boy as tough in spirit and as eager for good times as Tex was is unbroken misery. In the late 1870s there was still plenty of antelope, turkeys, and other wild game on the rolling prairies. The buffalo was gone from Texas by the time Rickard was nine, but all of his life he recalled the buffalo hunts his dad had taken him on "where Wichita Falls, quite a city today, now stands."

Like so many men who grow up with breath-taking natural beauty all about them, Rickard took it pretty much for granted. But in that still-virginal land no child could have failed to be stirred deeply by wonder as he wandered out into that prairie to discover no beginning or end to the sky or the earth. There were wild flowers there by the million, fish in profusion, pecans and wild fruits by the bushel for the finding and picking.

And there was always some rancher kind enough to lend him a cow-horse to ride to his heart's content.

These were the days that were good, the great days for Dink Rickard. On the many other days there was often not enough food in the overcrowded shack. And even when there were beans and sowbelly, corn pone and turnip greens to eat, there was never enough of everything else. Sometimes not enough clothes in good repair for the whole family to go to church together of a Sunday. Seldom enough coins in the cookie jar for a feast on Christmas



morning or Easter Sunday, or to buy a doll or a small toy bright with paint, for the little ones.

What burned like an angry fire in Rickard all his life was the memory of seeing his mother for years, night after night, washing and ironing, darning, mending hand-me-downs. This while needing to appear cheerful and hopeful that his father would presently be strong enough to work regularly.

For Tex knew then, long before he grew up, that even a Lucretia Rickard, with the heart of a lioness, finds it almost impossible to hold up her head in a little town when you owe money to so many kind people who have trusted you.

Just before the Rickards arrived, a great feud had begun to blow up between Cambridge and Henrietta over the possession of the county seat and post office. It started with name calling and fights between the boys of the rival towns. Dink Rickard was an early casualty. He suffered two black eyes and a bloody nose because he resented a bigger Henrietta youngster's calling him a "lick-skillet."

When he got home he told his parents that he'd suffered his contusions and abrasions in a fall out of a pecan tree. His dad looked at him and winked to let him know that he was willing for Dink's mama to accept that tall story, though he himself was not fooled.

For months the bucolic Machiavellis in the two opposing towns pulled every political string to obtain possession of the all-important papers. In Henrietta it has always been said that its men got them first but that certain untrustworthy skunks from Cambridge came over one day and "spirited them away." A few days later a bunch of lickered-up Henrietta cowboys agreed on an appropriate revenge.

Jumping on their horses, they rode into Cambridge, roped the one-story shack temporarily being used as a post office, and dragged it off its foundations. Their original plan was to haul it in triumph all the way back to Henrietta. But after considerable muscle straining and tugging, the men agreed this idea might be a trifle overambitious. They decided instead just to take away the new safe. They pushed the shack over on its side, sawed a hole in

the floor, and dragged the safe out. When they arrived in Henrietta, toting their prize in triumph, it proved to contain not only the papers but also the necessary post office paraphernalia for marking and stamping mail—and a large number of stamps. With these they opened the county seat and post office with great ceremony in Henrietta.

The Cambridgers were anything but quitters. They immediately engaged the Henrietta cowboys in a series of pitched battles in which several men were killed.

The older pioneers decided there was no use acting like a lot of damn Yankees. There were peace conferences galore. First, the matter was to be decided by vote, but after this was done the Cambridgers complained loudly that the Henrietta cowboys had brought in "ringers" from every place between Fort Worth and the Staked Plains.

It was next proposed that a horse race settle the whole thing, but this sporting contest was also followed by raucous charges and countercharges of fraud.

The end of the quarrel came only in 1882, when the Fort Worth & Denver Railroad put a station at Henrietta. Cambridge just gave up then and permitted itself to be merged with its neighbor.

But that was a year so black for his family that Dink paid little attention, though he'd been interested enough before that in the intertown squabble.

Early that spring Robert Woods Rickard died. It had been one thing for Lucretia to struggle and fight and scrimp and make do while there was a chance her man would get well.

And now, as though she didn't have enough on her hands, she had taken in two more children to raise, her own baby brother and young sister.

After the funeral for her husband, Lucretia came back to the unpainted cabin. At the door she told her oldest, Minnie, to keep the little ones outside as she had to speak alone for a moment to Dink. But when they got inside, all she could think of to say was: "I'm afraid you'll have to be the man of the house from now on, George Lewis."

Then she went to the door, waved to Minnie to bring the rest of the children in, and set to work furiously in the kitchen, preparing the evening meal.

Two days later Dink told her that he was quitting school. She protested. "You can't, George. You're only in the third grade now. You need more education."

"I didn't want to say anything until I got a steady job. It's on Mr. Jim Curtis's ranch, Ma, and it pays ten dollars a month. He'll come over tonight to ask you if it's all right for me to work at his place over near Henrietta."

She did her best to make herself, the children, and the cabin tidy. She wanted the wealthy rancher to think that Dink came from respectable people, even if they were poor. When he arrived, Mr. Curtis told her, "He's a mighty ambitious lad, and he seemed kinda disappointed when I told him I had a foreman already. But he kept hanging around out there at my ranch and soon I had to tell him I didn't need no assistant foreman neither."

"To make a long story short, ma'am, he ended up asking me if he could get paid for doing chores. Well, we two men came to our agreement all by ourselves." While he was talking, Jim Curtis had been studying her troubled face. And now he added quietly, "He's a hard-working little fellow. I think he'd make himself quite useful around the house. But it would mean his living out there with us. Do you think you could spare him, Mrs. Rickard?"

When Lucretia hesitated, he added that Dink would be sent to school if he was still working on the ranch the following winter. He also explained that he would pay Dink ten dollars a month and keep.

"Isn't that what the average full-grown man gets on a ranch?" she asked, a little uncertainly.

"Yes, but I'll see that he earns it." Before he left he pressed an envelope into her hand. "Your boy didn't ask me to pay him in advance," he said, "but I thought a little cash might come in handy around here just now."

After he left, Lucretia opened up the envelope and almost fainted. It contained five crisp ten-dollar bills—more cash money than the family had seen at any one time in several years. She used a little of it to pay to have her cabin hauled to Henrietta so Dink could come home whenever he had some free time.

And when Dink visited the shack, he seemed happy. He idolized his boss, and Mrs. Curtis, Lucretia could see, was mothering him, something she herself had never had much time to do.

One of Dink's daily duties was to go to town each morning just before noon to remind his boss that dinner, which was served at the ranch exactly at twelve, was waiting. Like the other local cattlemen, Mr. Curtis was in the habit of visiting one of the saloons each day, after his morning's work was done, to talk and drink with the other cattlemen.

On one morning that Rickard never forgot, he looked into four of the town's five saloons without finding him. In the last of these, one of the cowboys at the bar told him, "Jim was around here just a little while ago with Van Rice." He looked at Dink and added, "You better get on home, son."

The ten-year-old boy walked out to the board sidewalk not knowing what to do. He had heard Mr. Curtis telling some of his hands that he and Van Rice, a rival cattleman, had been having some trouble over the ownership of a small herd of steers.

Dink was in the middle of the dusty street, trying to figure out whether to return to the ranch house or to continue looking for Mr. Curtis, when he heard shots coming from Dodge's Saloon, the one he had not visited that morning.

With heart pounding, he raced through the doors.

Two men were lying dead on the floor. One was Van Rice. The other was Jim Curtis. A third man, a cowboy who had jumped between the two cattlemen crying "For God's sake, don't shoot!" was holding his wrist which was dripping with blood. Van Rice's first bullet had struck him, then ricocheted into Jim Curtis's chest.

This man later told Dink that Rice had drawn and fired first and that his boss had crumpled to the floor. Then, he said, Jim Curtis raised himself to a sitting position by grasping the brass footrail with one hand, drew his gun, and shot his assailant once through the heart.

They both died almost at the same instant.

# 3

## The heart of the violence

DINK CONTINUED doing chores for Mrs. Curtis for the rest of the summer. Then he surprised his mother by getting a job with one of the outfits going north that fall.

He had heard that some outfits were paying men as much as \$25 or \$35 a month, and hoped to make that himself after a few years.

In trail driving, of course, lay the heart of the violence then inseparable from the cattle business. Before the Civil War, the drovers had hostile Indians to contend with as they took their herds—of from 2,000 to 6,000 head each—on their great drives to the north. The Indians were no longer a problem after the Civil War, but the cattlemen were confronted by many new harassments. Their livestock, turned loose on the ranges, had gone wild during the four years the Texans had been away fighting with the Confederate army. The work of catching, containing, branding, and calming the obstreperous longhorns was enough to try the souls of men with endless patience, no less hot-tempered Texans.

Now, as the outfits arrived in Missouri, they were met by battalions of farmers armed with court orders forbidding the herds

to come through; also, the pitchforks and guns with which to enforce them.

The bedeviled Texans had experimented with packing plants of their own. But these failed because only the choicest meats were then being salted and pickled. The Texas packers salvaged whatever else they could by selling the hides and rendering the fat into tallow. However, millions of pounds of meat had to be dumped into the Gulf of Mexico, where the fish, shrimp, and other crustaceans never had it so good.

This was the tumultuous background of the business that George Lewis Rickard entered when he was eleven years old. By then the cattlemen for some years had been sending their longhorns to cowtowns in western Kansas. During the ten years Rickard was a cowboy, the Texans kept pointing their herds farther and farther west as the country became more settled with the spread of the railroads.

During the early eighties most trail-driving outfits included boys no older than Dink. Such little waddies were handed the unpleasant job of horse wrangler. The horse wrangler was responsible for the 150 horses in the outfit. He was expected to remember the working habits and temperamental peculiarities of each. But he himself was allowed to ride only the most dilapidated of the mounts and he was also the favorite butt of whatever practical jokes the wags in the outfit could think up between Texas and Kansas.

If the memories of old-timers can be trusted, Dink Rickard suffered much less than other beginners from this kind of hazing. He was a grave-faced, earnest, hard-working boy, always eager to please, but in no way a groveler.

"I was a little man," he himself said of this job, "just as the others were big men, and both of us had our work to do."

Even at eleven, Rickard, it appears, displayed some of the extraordinary reserve and dignity which later caused thousands of rough-necks from Nome to Paraguay to approach him with their hats in their hands, ask him for advice and help, depend on him as on a father, a leader. Most of these men were simple people and subject to all the torments and enthusiasms of adolescents. And like children they knew instinctively which grownup they could trust.

Rickard always felt that his character and emotions were shaped

during that first trip on the trail—which ended in Hunnewell, Kansas—and those which followed.

Often he talked of how rough and dangerous the going was and of the sudden storms, battering hailstones, and the ever-present fear of a stampede. A stampede could be started by almost anything, and the longhorns' nervousness was equaled only by their ferocity. A sudden noise could panic the cows. So could a howling coyote, the rattle of a tin can, a shot fired by a careless cowboy at a jack rabbit. A thunderstorm meant coping with beasts maddened by terror and uncontrollable for hours. A stampede might also be provoked by any unusual sight—that of a cowboy on foot, for example. Scores of men were trampled to death in these stampedes, and entire herds were scattered.

Tex also spoke of doing forty-eight hours in the saddle at a stretch and being so tired afterward that he slept on the bare ground like a dead man. He never forgot the sharp smell of danger that kept everyone's nerves on edge, the fellows who had narrow escapes, and several who didn't escape and were buried on the prairie.

Frequently he dreamed of waking up with heaps of gold around him. He said he'd think about getting rich almost every night just before closing his eyes. He would look up at the sky and tell himself fiercely:

"Some day I'll reach up, grab every one of them stars, pull them down, and turn each one into a whole round gold dollar."

At the end of the dream he saw himself appearing in the doorway of his family's rickety, unpainted shack, his pockets crammed with money, and dressed like the cowboys he admired, from the white Stetson on his head to the silver spurs on his boots.

And in the dream they were all there—Ma, his sisters and brother Bob, his little uncle and aunt. But his mother's face was the one he'd watch as he threw his thirty-five-dollar Stetson across the room and yelled, "Well, folks, I got news for you. I'm rich, and that means all us Rickards are rich. You'll never have to scrub another dirty shirt, Ma. You'll never have to pump another bucket of water, or worry about a bill."

But Tex's most vivid memory of his first years working on the trail concerned the shooting of one love-smitten cowboy by an-

other. Kerby and the Tripper were the names Rickard remembered them by. They had surprised Big Matt, the trail boss, and the rest of the boys by riding up to the outfit together the second night out. This because when last seen together, they had been trying to shoot daylight through one another in a Henrietta saloon over a girl they considered the prettiest in all Texas.

"Nobody was hurt," said Rickard, "but a feller who happened to stroll in for a drink while the shooting was going on. One of the bullets keeled him right over in the doorway. After that the two made themselves scarce."

Instead of being flattered by having a gun duel fought for her hand, the girl married a third man whom both the Tripper and Kerby had considered an outsider. He was a druggist's son who wore spectacles.

"You'd think them two fellers would have made up permanently after that, but they didn't," Tex said. "They seemed to hate each other worse than ever while we was on the trail.

"They hadn't been with us for more than a few days before they started bickering. Late one afternoon I heard a shot, and we found poor Kerby with a bullet in his stomach. He had his own six-shooter in his hand, but hadn't had a chance to use it before the Tripper drilled him, and got away.

"The men thought there was a doctor living forty or fifty miles away, but none of them could agree about just where he lived. Big Matt let as many of them go as he could spare, and put a tarpaulin, propped up on sticks, over the wounded cowboy.

" 'You stay with him, son, until the boys come back,' he told me. 'The rest of us will have to go on a few miles ahead with the herd.'"

"As night came on, I sat with the wounded man and listened to his moans, bringing water and waiting on him as best I could," Rickard said. "Every once in a while I heard the shriek of a coyote.

"Kerby seemed barely conscious, and I began to feel lonely. Unless you yourself have sat alone on a prairie at night, with the stars overhead shining bright as electric light bulbs, you have no idea how it can make your hair stand on end.

"And as I sat there, shivering, the poor cowboy died. I put a lantern at his feet and stayed there with his body for the rest of the night.



"I think I grew into an old man on that terrible night. I can never forget that experience as long as I live. Mind you, I was only eleven years old, and the cowboys did not come back with the doctor until after six o'clock in the morning.

"Kerby was buried on the prairie under a tree. The foreman said the sermon, a one-sentence prayer that all of the cowboys understood. 'May God have mercy on poor Kerby's soul,' said Big Matt that day, 'and keep the coyotes from digging him up.' "

When a little man like Dink was graduated from the job of horse wrangler, he could look forward to being promoted to the job of tail, or drag, driver behind the herd. This required him to ride behind the herd and keep the weak and lame stragglers moving. In that job Tex rode from day to night in the dust, the stench, and the heat floating behind the thousands of longhorns.

Rickard's next promotion made him a full-fledged trail driver, working as a point rider at the head of the herd, or at its side.

Toward the end of a long drive Tex watched the men grow more irritable each day. The quarreling was continuous, although the cowboys' loyalty to their own outfits kept them working on doggedly. But they talked a lot about quitting trail driving forever the moment the tricky and temperamental tons of beef on the hoof were delivered.

Dink also saw what happened after the pay-off was made. The bewhiskered, disheartened, dirty-as-dirt men hardly waited to count their money, but raced off to get preened, polished, and dressed in bright-colored new outfits for the big spree.

Then came the works: everything they'd been dreaming of, whisky, whores, dance halls, and the gambling tables. For dissipation was the cowtown's other big industry. There was also its steady production of bad men, and the great fighting marshals and sheriffs named Earp and Masterson and Wild Bill Hickok, who both fought and played poker with them.

Sometimes Dink saw the grumbling cowboys he had been working with for more than two months squander every cent of their pay in one night. He observed, too, how rarely they complained of not having been given their money's worth.

And the twelve-year-old Rickard, the little boy who dreamed

night and day of getting gold for his family, knew that these wild-spending, tough, lonely, primitive cowboys were his breed.

Tex was about eighteen when he went on his first of several autumn cattle drives he made to Montana. He and the rest of the outfit remained there until spring, taking care of the longhorns who were fattening up on the state's virginal grasses.

The Montana ranchmen believed also in fattening up the cowboys on white bread, canned tomatoes, canned peaches, and other delicacies. Back home and on the trail the cowboys usually had to get along on sowbelly, corn pone, and beans. For the first time they had tents to sleep in, some of which were heated by oil stoves. The Texans were highly suspicious of these effete luxuries at first, even though they complained about the cold. Sitting around the campfire with them, Tex listened to their boasts that they could go any place a horse could and stand anything a cow could.

In the outfit were three other teen-age cowboys—Newt Gibson, Matt Shaw, and Billy Newberry—who talked almost every night about the perfect train robbery they planned to commit. Rickard took it all in, and believed not a word of it.

Rickard went along with the longhorns that spring on the cattle train to Chicago. On getting back to Texas he was surprised to learn that the three youthful braggarts had carried out their threat by robbing an express company messenger on a Northern Pacific train of \$60,000. Only Shaw was caught, and within a few hours he escaped.

Tex never could see the irony in what happened to the other two desperadoes. When Newberry and Gibson got home, their mothers forced them to return their part of the loot to the express company.

Meanwhile Matt Shaw was living the life of a hunted animal. He had been shackled when arrested. On escaping he managed to break the iron chain between his handcuffs, but was unable to get rid of the cuffs themselves. Though afraid to ask for help, Shaw managed to make it on his own all the way back to Texas. He had cached his share of the loot up north, but after the express company promised not to press charges against him his parents got him to tell where he had buried his money.

"That was just as well," said Rickard. "Luckily, they hadn't shot

anybody. And those boys weren't real criminals. They could be as kind to a kitten as anyone else. Like a lot of other young cowboys they was just led astray by Jesse James's bad example."

His comment on the fate of Foster Crawford, another cowboy-bandit he worked with several years later, also was revealing. Rickard met Crawford when they were \$25-a-month line riders on a big ranch near Henrietta. Rickard had just become twenty-one, Crawford was almost thirty.

A line rider's work is to patrol the boundaries of a ranch, keeping an eye out for rustlers and straying cows. Each morning Rickard would ride off in one direction, Crawford in the other. Late in the afternoon they'd meet at the far end of their boss's ranch. There they'd build a fire, catch up on their sleep, or talk.

Crawford was a short, dark man with a black mustache. Rickard had never met a cowboy like him. Crawford recited poetry in French even though Tex protested he couldn't understand a word of it, and also talked a good deal about a girl he had loved who had died. But most afternoons Foster Crawford pleaded with Tex to join him in a bank robbery which he had planned out in great detail. Tex always just shook his head.

At 2:30 P.M., on February 26, 1896, Crawford and a nineteen-year-old desperado named Elmer Lewis, alias "the Slaughter Kid" and "the Mysterious Kid," stuck up the City National Bank in Wichita Falls, Texas. It was a thoroughly messed up job. The pair stole \$450 and overlooked \$1,000 more lying within easy reach, shot the cashier to death, and wounded two other bank officials.

They were captured that night and taken to the Wichita Falls jail. A few hours later a mob of indignant citizens dragged them out and hanged them from a telegraph pole. The Slaughter Kid died defiant and game, but Foster Crawford sobbed and begged the crowd for mercy.

In telling the story Tex invariably avoided mentioning this last detail. An old Texas editor who knew the story once asked him why.

Tex rubbed his chin and said, "Figger when they hang a man it's punishment enough. I don't see any use in blackenin' his memory more than I have to."

Yet, all of his life, Tex was a man who admired gameness more

than anything else and, next to that, marksmanship. As a youth around Henrietta, his idol was Sheriff Cooper Wright, whom he considered the gamest man he ever knew.

Not long before he became city marshal of Henrietta, Rickard watched Cooper Wright take a man being hanged right out of the hands of two hundred lickered-up cowboys. The man being lynched was named Stegall. He had been accused of a sex crime against a child. After getting their anger properly stoked up in Henrietta's pine-board saloons, the two hundred cowboys, all carrying Colts, had stormed the calaboose. Kicking the door in, they cowed the jailer and dragged Stegall to the nearest telegraph pole. They had him hanging from a rope before the stalwart sheriff arrived on the scene.

With a couple of other young fellows, Dink Rickard watched the excited mob from the roof of a shed. He saw Wright arrive, leap to the steps of the calaboose. Drawing his gun, he shouted, "Stop that!"

As the crowd turned around, the sheriff shot three times at the rope from which Stegall was hanging. The third bullet cut it, and the hanging man crashed to the ground.

"Don't none of you move!" yelled the sheriff, and walked through the crowd with his gun held in front of him. When Wright reached Stegall's side and saw that he was still alive, he led the stunned man back to the calaboose and locked him up. When he came out again, he ordered the crowd to disperse. They obeyed, and made no subsequent attempt to lynch Stegall, who in due time was tried and convicted in the circuit court and sentenced to life.

"Many of those two hundred armed men were just as game as Wright was," Tex said, "but they knew that the sheriff was right and would stake his life on doing the right thing. They were in the wrong and he made them feel it. That's where he licked them."

Down through the years things gradually became a little easier for Lucretia Rickard. Finally she was able to save enough out of the money Tex gave her to buy a little farm on which the younger children raised most of the food for the table.

With whatever he had left over, Tex was beginning to play poker and buck the tiger at faro. Once he won a hundred dollars in a

crap game at Wichita Falls and used the money to buy a merry-go-round. He operated this for about a month in other small towns, then sold out and came back to Henrietta.

He told his mother that he was going back to being a cowboy. "I'd rather rassel any time with a bunch of tough old longhorns, Ma," he told Lucretia, "than try to argue ragged little kids out of free rides on that merry-go-round."

Rickard didn't remain in the cattle business long after that. One day he was gored and thrown off his horse by a steer while taking a small herd across the Big Wichita River. He was being trampled when another cowboy got a rope to him and hauled him out of the water. When his mother heard of this she made him promise to try some other business.

Tex thought that over. For quite a while friends of his had been urging him to run for city marshal. Feeling somewhat sheepish about it, Rickard let them put his name up for the job. On April 5, 1894, the Henrietta City Council counted the ballots and announced that Lucretia Rickard's boy had won by a whopping plurality, receiving 209 votes against 136 for D. W. MacMillian and 6 for J. Croxdale, the third candidate.

That same spring Rickard married Leona Bittick, the daughter of one of Henrietta's pioneer physicians. They'd been courting for some time. Leona was a sweet-tempered girl and adored her husband, who was now a quiet-spoken, strapping young fellow just an inch short of six feet. Unlike most other men who were cowboys when very young, Tex never developed the so-called trail driver's slouch. All his life he stood straight as a soldier.

Tex loved being marshal in his home town. He was proud of his gold badge, broad-brimmed hat, and blue uniform. So was his bride. That year, 1894, was the best and happiest year he ever knew as a young man.

The old-timers say Henrietta never had a police official who maintained order with so little fuss the year round. For it was, of course, as a man with a star on his coat that Rickard for the first time had a chance to demonstrate his genius for controlling and calming men who five minutes before had been ready to kill one another.

There were only two or three untoward events during the year

Tex was in office. One happened the day Rickard learned that a saloonkeeper he had jailed for drunkenness on his own premises had threatened to shoot him on sight.

Tex went to the office of the local insurance agency and applied for a \$5,000 life policy, then walked into the bar to confront the man who had threatened him. Nobody else was there, and neither reported the conversation later on. But when other customers began to drift in a few minutes later, they found the saloonkeeper and the marshal amiably chatting away like old pals.

Then there was the occasion when a stray bullet whistled out of a saloon, crossed the street, and creased the marshal's skull as he stood in front of the blacksmith's shop. Rickard looked up and saw a character known as Pete the Pest running out of the saloon. Investigation revealed that the bullet had been intended for Pete, who was banned from all local grogshops because of his habit of starting arguments between the other barflies.

The marshal walked across the dirt road and through the swinging doors. He took off his wrecked Stetson and uncovered his bleeding scalp.

"Who shot that there bullet at Pete the Pest?"

Everybody at the bar turned and stared accusingly at the saloonkeeper. The man behind the bar admitted he was responsible.

"Well, you can buy me a new hat!" said Rickard. "For ten years I've been listening to a lot of hoorah from you about your shootin'."

"Ain't you gonna fine me *nothin'* for making a dent in your skull, Dink?"

"It ain't no dent. Just a crease. Doc Bittick will put some plaster on it for me. But I'm buyin' a hat on your money soon as Doc slaps some court plaster on that crease."

The fee method used in paying the Henrietta town marshal's wages gave Rickard \$2.50 for each person arrested and \$1 for each animal found and impounded for wandering in the main part of town. Rickard averaged \$50 a month and could easily have made much more if he had arrested half the drunken cowboys he came across each Saturday night. Unless they became abusive, Rickard had the other boys take them back to the bunkhouse to sleep off their jags.

Carousing cattlemen he had less patience with. Like so many men who have been poor boys, Rickard could be quite censorious and stuffy about any misbehavior on the part of well-to-do persons.

There were other reasons why Rickard was a popular official among most of Henrietta's voters. He was an excellent shot, a whiz at faro and poker, was forever arranging dances, picnics, barbecues, outings to ball parks in whatever neighboring towns the Henrietta nine happened to be playing. He could drink his share of good whisky without getting drunk, and was the fastest man in town at buying a round for the house.

Most of the social affairs he arranged were for the benefit of the local fire department, and no one could raise money so quickly from the local merchants and other businessmen for this purpose as Tex could. When the fire company got its first chemical truck, Rickard enjoyed the honor of driving it behind Charlie, the department's huge and frisky black horse.

If the grownups of Henrietta liked Rickard, the children worshipped him. He was always on their side when they got into mischief. If he caught two boys fighting he would tell them to go ahead and get it out of their systems, and would referee to make sure they fought fair.

Rickard also made a deal to pay the local boys 25 cents each for the wandering animals they captured downtown and brought to the city pound. One boy, J. Fred Eppler, became a most assiduous assistant at this mutually profitable occupation.

But the plan misfired the day young Eppler brought in a very pregnant sow that gave birth overnight to fourteen pigs. City Marshal Rickard told him next morning that if he wanted to collect his fifteen quarters—or \$3.75—of the official fee, all he need do was to find the owner of the sow.

While they were talking, the door of the office was rudely kicked open by Sheriff Cooper Wright.

"What's this about you taking in an old sow last night?" he asked angrily.

Rickard grinned. "We'll have a few rounds of drinks out of this, Sheriff. She had fourteen young ones, all told, that will bring in one round dollar each."

"And you want me to pay you fifteen dollars? Me, the sheriff?"

Rickard's eyes opened in astonishment—and pain. "It's *your* sow, Sheriff?"

"Of course! That boy of yours here can just take time off now to help me drive that sow and her pigs home."

Early in 1895 Leona Rickard had a baby boy. He lived only a week. The following month, on March 11, Leona, who had never recovered from her grief, also died.

From that day on Henrietta, his home town, never looked quite the same to George Lewis Rickard. One night, a few weeks after her death, he was sitting around with a bunch of cattlemen in Satterfield's General Store, which sold hardware, groceries, feed, clothes, and liquor. One of them said he had just got a letter from Jim Roberts, a rancher they all knew who had gone up to Alaska in 1890. When he started reading it, they all agreed that, whatever else had happened to old Jim up there, he sure hadn't lost his sense of humor. The letter was full of jokes about whisky freezing so hard up north "that you can carry it around in your back pocket like a plug of tobacco and bite off a drink whenever you feel like it." Jim Roberts also said it was so cold up there most of the time that he'd climb into the stove and sleep on top of the fire except that some fool would come along and leave the door open. They all enjoyed a lot of chuckles over that one, but no one laughed harder than Will Slack, the town prankster.

"But listen to this," said the cattleman, reading. "Jim says that flour is a dollar a pound up there."

"A dollar a pound!" Everybody gasped.

"Old Jim says that's because there was a gold strike up there where he is. They dug out fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold in that one place—in a week, he says. Jim Roberts had his faults like everyone else, but he never was a liar."

Slack stopped laughing and looked at Rickard. The city marshal nodded. When they had a chance to talk together later on, Rickard said, "I got nothin' here to hold me now, Will. Ma and the family can make a go of it on their own now."

"I got nothin' holding me, neither," said Will Slack.

"A dollar a pound for flour!" exclaimed Tex.



"Fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold dug up in a week!" said Will Slack.

"I wouldn't want to go that far away without a pardner, a feller I could trust. Maybe a feller like you, who has a sense of fun. That always helps when things get rough."

"Count me in, Dink," said Will Slack.

Within the next few days Tex resigned as marshal and raised enough money to get to Alaska. Everybody except Lucretia thought the expedition was a great idea. To get her to agree, Tex promised he wouldn't go into the really wild part of the frozen country.

A big delegation of citizens came down to see Will Slack and George Lewis Rickard off on their great adventure. As the train pulled out of the Texas & Pacific Railroad station there was much cheering and many hearty cries, wishing them well and a safe return.

Rickard heard the cheering and grinned his thanks as he waved. But his eyes stayed on his mother standing there, surrounded by his sisters and his brother Bob. His mother, who had the heart of a lioness, looked tiny to him for the first time. And he never forgot her face, which was burning with the fervent hope that this would not be the last time she would see the son who had made her prouder than any queen.

# 4

## Paradise on ice

THE TWO TEXANS arrived in Alaska late in November of that year, 1895. That gave Tex Rickard a walloping head start over the horde of anything-for-a-buck gamblers who began racing north, side by side with the Klondike gold rushers two summers later. Before that gimlet-eyed crew could get into the action, Tex had made and lost his first fortune, had taken over and lost his first couple of gambling houses—and knew the score.

Actually, there were two armies in the crazy stampede which reached its height in 1898: the army of suckers, and the army out to sell them something, to clip them, coming and going. Those in the first army were convinced that the yellow nuggets were lying like gleaming pebbles, all over the Yukon Valley. Among these were thousands of mom haters, wife haters, boss haters, footloose adventurers, would-be heroes, remittance men, cads who had wronged young women, drunkards who had disgraced their families, and a scattering of mining engineers. Also a large number of love-smitten young fellows who intended to remain in the North just long enough to scoop up the gold they needed to finance their marriages.

Sixty-five per cent or so of those in the second army shared the

prejudice of the crooked gamblers against suffering from frostbite and aching backs. They saw no need for it because their whole plan was to get their share of the nuggets and gold dust from the rushers, indoors.

This was also true of the merchants, theatrical performers, and others who hurried up there to equip, serve, and entertain the first army. Few in this one-third of the second army were overscrupulous, though they at least had the decency to pretend to be honest. Among the others who didn't bother were pimps; the whores who traveled singly, in pairs, and by the carload; smart-angle workers and all other known varieties of cuties; criminals in full flight; other scoundrels with clean noses at the moment; and an occasional dope peddler.

Some of the outstanding characters of the Old West including Wyatt Earp, Lucky Baldwin, and that fascinating old poet-faker Joaquin Miller, joined the race to the Yukon, or Nome, later on. Some folks claimed they had also seen Calamity Jane up there in the Land of the Deep Snows.

At least seven of the young people who ventured there later became figures of national importance: in this group were Jack London and Rex Beach, the best-selling authors; Alexander Pantages and Sid Grauman, whose showmanship drew countless millions to their motion-picture temples; Wilson Mizner, the wit and playwright whose greatest production was his own irrepressible and exuberant personality; Key Pittman, the colorful United States Senator from Nevada, whose explosive temper became a legend in Washington; and Miss Marjorie Rambeau, one of the greatest of all Broadway beauties.

Miss Rambeau, then a child performer, was traveling with her mother and her grandmother, a missionary. Her mother, Mrs. Lillian Garlinda Kindleberger, took no stock in the stories then current about the crude, bearded prospectors being all great and noble knights under their dirt-encrusted exteriors. She disguised her small pearl of great price as a boy. And it was like that, dressed as a street gamin, that Marjorie Rambeau won her first theatrical popularity. Among the resorts where she sang and played the banjo was Tex Rickard's famous Northern Saloon in Nome. Tex's enchanted customers pelted her with nuggets.

Though few people realized it in the mid-nineties, Indians, traders, Russians, and missionaries had for years been finding gold all over the great Yukon Valley, but never in sufficient quantity in one place to start a rush. However, for a dozen or more years pioneering prospectors, one or two at a time, had been trying their luck there in earnest. During the three ice-free summer months they had a choice of two routes to the interior. One was via the Bering Sea and the old Russian seaport, Saint Michael, far to the north. From Saint Michael they could sail up the shallow Yukon River in a small-draft wood-burning steamboat. The other approach was via Juneau, Dyea, and the perilous Chilkoot Pass, or through Skagway and the no safer White Pass.

But whichever route a prospector chose, he had to travel over the Yukon River, the only highway in the interior. Those who went over the passes still had to build their own boats before going on.

Because there was no other road, all fur-trading posts and mining towns were located on the river. During the summer supplies came into the valley over the Yukon, aboard the little steamboats. In winter the few urgent necessities arrived by dog sled over the river's frozen bed.

By the end of 1895 there were 1,700 gold-seekers in the valley in addition to the men working in mines near Juneau. The original gold-mining town was Forty Mile, established a dozen years before. But by the time Rickard and Slack reached Juneau, most of the population of Forty Mile had moved about 300 miles north to Birch Creek. Circle City, 70 miles from the new diggings, was the place where they got their supplies and had their fun. It was also the destination of the newcomers waiting in Juneau for the spring thaw.

Willie Slack had been seasick practically all of the way from San Francisco. Rickard failed completely in repeated attempts to rouse him from his bed of agony with cheery reports of the many interesting folks he was meeting on the deck. They all called him Tex, he said. Willie did not care. His attitude remained that of a man awaiting an ignominious death.

It was only when their ship docked at Juneau that Willie's seasickness vanished. But then he began complaining that he had never been so cold in his life. Tex, shuddering, said he had never been

so cold before either. Because of the closeness of the Japanese current, Juneau, in southern Alaska, is much warmer than the interior. But this only means it seldom drops below zero there. Even in July, no one has mistaken Juneau for Bermuda.

The moment Willie got solid ground under his feet he challenged Rickard to a foot race to the nearest saloon, and won. After gulping down his first couple of straight whiskies, Willie remarked that it was their hard luck to have arrived in the middle of a cold wave.

"Cold wave?" roared the man next to him. "You ain't seen nothin' yet, stranger. You ain't felt nothin'. What they need in this town is more electric fans!"

The startled cowboy looked up and for the first time observed that all the other men at the bar were wearing heavy fur coats. "Oh, that's why all you fellers are dressed up like grizzly bears," he said. Suddenly the side-splitting jokes in Jim Roberts's letter seemed less comical.

Willie remained obsessed by the cold as they toured the town, which lies at the foot of a 3,000-foot mountain that seems to shoot straight into the sky.

Rickard was delighted to find whole streets occupied entirely by saloons, honky-tonks, and dance halls. They were patronized mainly by the gold miners from creeks in the nearby Silver Bow Basin, and by transients, like himself and Mr. Slack, who were stopping over in Juneau before continuing north.

What baffled Willie during the weeks that followed was why everyone they met kept saying it was too cold to travel in the interior during the winter.

"I don't believe it *gets* eighty degrees below zero up there," he declared, "because zero's nothing, ain't it? And if there is nothing less than nothing everywhere else, why should it be different up here with the weather?"

Rickard, who was spending most of his time playing poker and faro—and making expenses for both of them—ignored Willie's incessant wailing about the weather as often as possible. But every once in a while he would lose his patience, and yell, "For the luvva Pete, shut up! I'm every bit as cold as you are."

Years later Rickard told Jack Lawrence, the sports writer: "What Slack was saying was true. I never seed nothin' like it. All the way from the plains of Texas people kept telling me how cold it was

gonna be. They told me a guy would have to spend five years at the Equator in order to get warm again after being in that Northern country for six months. But they didn't tell me the half of it."

One day Willie came to the furnished room they shared, looking even more glum than usual. "This is a list of the stuff we are supposed to lug up north with us," he said, and thrust the paper in his hand at Rickard. Tex carefully studied the items on this. They included: 400 pounds of flour, 50 of cornmeal, 50 of rolled oats, 35 of rice, 100 of beans, 40 of candles, 100 of granulated sugar, 8 of baking powder, 200 of bacon, 2 of soda, 15 of salt, 1 pound of pepper, a half pound of mustard, a quarter pound of ginger, 25 pounds of dried apples, 25 of dried peaches, 25 of dried apricots, 25 of smoked fish, 10 of pitted plums, 10 of raisins, 50 of evaporated onions, 50 of evaporated potatoes, 24 of coffee, 5 of tea, and 15 of soup. Also a steel stove, a gold pan, nests of granite buckets, one cup, a tin plate, a knife and fork, a teaspoon and tablespoon, whetstone, coffeepot, pick and handle, handsaw, whip-saw, hatchet, shovels, 20 pounds of nails, files, draw knife, ax and handle, three sizes of chisels, butcher knife, hammer, compass, jack plane, square, Yukon sled, 60 feet of quarter-inch lash rope, 150 feet of half-inch rope, 15 pounds of pitch, 10 pounds of oakum, two frying pans, woolen clothes, boots and shoes, snow glasses.

After Tex finished reading the list Willie waited in vain for him to say something, then said, "Don't you unnerstand, George? All of that stuff, except some of the tools and campin' stuff, is for *each of us*."

Rickard nodded.

Willie started jumping up and down. He screamed, "That there oakum, that pitch, and some of them tools is for *building a boat!*"

"Uh-huh," said his friend with a shrug.

"What do two dumb cowboys like us know about building a boat? We never did nothin' before, no work at all, except on a horse. You know *that*, George. But now we're gonna walk, you say, pullin' sleds up that mountain of ice, that Chilkoot Pass. Then down the other side, and then walk some more over them frozen lakes.

"After all that, we make a *boat!* They tell me, George, you gotta go by boat when all that ice melts. Because you can't walk in

this place we're going to except when there's ice on the ground. Because you sink in mud up to your neck."

When his friend remained calm, Willie said, "I'm not makin' all this *up*, George. People keep tellin' me this stuff. And they all say the boat us cowboys from Texas gotta make must be good enough to go over waterfalls, rapids, and every other kind of crazy mustang water."

"You can do what you like, Willie," Rickard told him scornfully. "I ain't turnin' back. It don't sound no tougher to me than gittin' thousands of loco longhorns up to them Kansas cowtowns used to be."

Willie lowered his eyes—and surrendered.

However, Tex's letters home that winter, particularly those he wrote to E. S. Matlock, one of his boyhood chums in Henrietta, reveal that he was less sanguine about the proposed trip than he pretended to be to Willie.

In one he said he was convinced that there was gold in Alaska but that "it might be damned hard to find. But I'll know more about that by June or July." He added that he hoped to earn enough money by prospecting to buy a ranch big enough to support him and the rest of the family. He and Willie expected to start for the Yukon on April 15, but he cautioned Matlock against telling his mother.

"I don't want her to know about it until we're all set to go," wrote Rickard, who was then twenty-four and a widower.

On February 22, he wrote Matlock wistfully:

"Well, I guess you boys will soon commence to play ball. Don't let Wichita Falls beet you all. I want you to beet them every gaim this year and do Bowie the same." Tex's spelling, even then, was not one of his major accomplishments.

Tex Rickard did start for Circle City with Slack on April 15. They made the overnight trip up the Lynn Canal to Dyea on a filthy little tugboat crowded to the gunwales with old sourdoughs, their horses and dogs, and a few cheechakos—newcomers—like themselves. There were no cabins, and men and beasts alike spent the night huddled together on the enclosed deck. Willie was again seasick.

Dyea was a dirty little Indian village at the foot of the Chilkoot

trail. From there the Texans pulled their sleds over the several rugged miles to Sheep Camp, at the timberline. This, of course, was the headquarters from which thousands upon thousands of men started on the desperate climb up Chilkoot during the rush.

The climb to the foot of Chilkoot Pass itself was so steep that it was, perhaps, just as well that the two Texans arrived there when it was dark. If Willie Slack, aching with fatigue in every one of his frozen joints, had first seen it in daylight, he might have dropped dead then and there, of sheer dismay.

For between Sheep Camp and the bottom of the 1,250-foot pass lay five miles of brutally steep grade. The standard Yukon sleds they were using are 7 feet long, but only 16 inches wide. In moderately cold weather a strong man can pull no more than his own weight on one of these—and that only on fairly level ground. As on the lap from Dyea, the two slim Texans had to transfer their tons of stuff over this stretch in relays, dumping one load in the snow, then returning to Sheep Camp for another.

There were Indian porters available for anyone who could pay their price, at that time one cent per pound for each mile of the way. But there was never any question of Tex and Willie's hiring an Indian to help them. After buying their supplies they were broke.

When they had completed all the trips and had dumped in the snow everything they owned, they faced the most agonizing challenge of the whole journey: the job of scaling the pass itself—but again and again.

It was impossible to drag a sled over those terrible 1,250 feet, which were on a 45 per cent uphill grade. You could only get over it with a pack of 50 pounds or less on your back.

Rickard himself considered the climb the toughest job he ever attempted. "After working ourselves into a sweat," Tex said, "we would nearly freeze each time we stopped to rest. Every once in a while Slack would shake his head and tell me, 'George, Texas may be short on gold, but she's sure short on ice and cold weather, too.'"

Tex said it made his back ache just to think of that final leg of the ascent. "And when we got the sleds up to the crest and



started loading them," he explained, "we were a coupla wrecks. We were on the ropes for fair.

"Then we started to slide down the other side, and about every hundred yards the sleds would upset and scatter our stuff all over Alaska. On the way down, one of the sleds capsized and a lot of our stuff went shooting down a gorge and out of sight. I guess it's there yet."

As Will Slack continued chattering about the cold, Rickard often lost his temper, and yelled, "Talk about something else, willya?"

Will would reply meekly, "Somehow I can't *think* of nothin' else just now, George."

On reaching the bottom of the slope the pair started across the string of frozen lakes which led to the headwaters of the Yukon River. Battered by 50-degree-below weather, blizzards, and winds that cut like tigers' teeth, Willie became so miserable that for whole days he couldn't summon enough strength even to complain. But one day, when he was at the height of his wretchedness, they passed two old sourdoughs coming from the opposite direction.

"Mornin', strangers," said one of the two prospectors. He glanced up at the sky and added, "Looks like we're gonna get some cold weather real soon."

As they passed on and out of sight, Willie fell into a deep silence. Then he started muttering. After about a half hour of this, the distracted Tex thought he'd better listen to what his friend was saying. Will Slack, he discovered, was merely repeating over and over again the sourdough's jesting words. Every once in a while he would interrupt this, and whimper, "And we're still pointed north!"

Usually, when discussing this, Tex would say, sagely, "I could see the thing seemed to be working on his mind."

On reaching the Yukon's headwaters a day or two later—340 miles from Juneau—Willie took one long look at the open water and groaned something about not caring to turn boatmaker at his age. Then, abruptly, he held out his thickly gloved hand. "George," he said, "this is where I say good-by. I may be dumb, but I ain't no fool."

Tex's first thought was that his friend had gone loco. Next he decided Willie must be joking, and laughingly gripped the out-

stretched glove in his own. But Willie Slack wasn't joking. Without another word, he turned his sled around and headed back toward Juneau. The stunned Rickard stood staring after his friend as long as he could see him. Then he went on more determinedly than ever.

Rickard never saw Will Slack again. That poor cowboy managed to make it all the way back to the Mexican border, only to be shot to death less than a year later in a barroom gun fight there.

The day after Will Slack gave up, Tex met a group of men on the trail who invited him to join their party. They were building boats in which to travel up the Yukon when the ice broke up.

The Yukon, as Tex was about to discover, is a vagabond and the great clown among the earth's mighty rivers. It wanders north and west drunkenly, first through the Canadian Northwest, then through Alaska until it touches the Arctic Circle; then, turning once more, it proceeds south and west to empty itself into the Bering Sea.

Tex saw one of the Yukon's best tricks that May when the ice broke. Great chunks of ice piled up along the shore with a roar and a grinding crash which sounded as though the world were splitting. During the weeks that followed, he and his new-found companions shot the White Horse Rapids and survived the dozen other hair-raising adventures that were then standard hazards of the trip between Dyea and Circle City.

As the party traveled north, the temperature rose with surprising swiftness from 50 degrees below zero to 80 above. And with the vanishing of the ice and snow, the cold, dead land burst impatiently into life, with wild flowers and berries growing everywhere. Waterfalls leaped from great heights, bubbling, foaming, seeming to dance with joy. It was as though nature wanted to lose not a moment of the brief time before the land would again be frozen into immobility.

The thousand miners who rushed to Birch Creek two years before had built about 400 cabins at Circle City to live in when not working their claims. These little houses were all 14-by-14 feet square, constructed of round spruce logs, and identical in every other way. To help keep out the winter cold, the miners piled a foot

of sod on the roofs and stuffed mud and rags into the spaces between the logs.

Circle City, with its rows of identical square log cabins, resembled nothing so much as the towns in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. As in a storybook town, Circle City's principal industry was the purveying of fun and amusement, even though its recreations were not of the sort Andersen wrote about. There were twenty-eight saloons, dance halls, gambling shacks, and an opera house, and only two general stores and three blacksmith shops.

Again, as in a fairy tale, there were no police courts, lawyers, judge, post office, and practically no crime. However, the storybook atmosphere was displayed most flamboyantly during May and June. Then, when viewed from afar, Circle City reminded travelers of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Vale of Kashmir. This was because the miners had planted flowers, vegetables, and grass in the sod on their roofs.

The warmth from the sun overhead and the heat rising from the stoves inside the cabins caused the ice on the roofs to melt long before it did on the ground. Judge Wickersham, pioneer Alaskan jurist, declared that this gave him "the illusion that he was entering a raised but wide field of green crops and flaming flowers. Many a vegetable garden grew on the housetops when the earth supporting them was solidly frozen many feet in depth."

Unfortunately, the flaming flowers and green crops were not the only things that leaped out of the ground when the three-month summer day arrived. According to Indian legend there had once been a beautiful lake where the town stood. The bed of this lake was now dotted with innumerable shallow ponds and covered with moss so deep that Wilson Mizner complained that it did everything "but jump up and wrestle with a man." Mosquitoes rose from the ponds in such numbers that at times they blacked out the sun. To protect themselves from these man-eating swarms, the Circle City-ites, through the summer, burned smudge pots before their cabins night and day.

The term "man-eating" is no exaggeration. The Alaskan mosquitoes have been known literally to kill prospectors. No sane Birch Creek miner crossed the miles of muskeg between his claim

and the town without covering every inch of his skin with heavy clothing. If he brought a horse along, he covered the animal with canvas sheets. But he had to stop every few moments to clean out the beast's nostrils. If he neglected doing this the horse snuffed up so many insects that it strangled.

Tex was stone-broke when he finally stumbled into this strange town. He lost no time getting himself a job in Sam Bonnifield's gambling shack. Rickard told Bonnifield that he intended to go out prospecting for gold as soon as he got together a decent-sized stake for himself.

And that was the day that Tex—in that fairy-tale sort of town, fittingly enough—walked through the invisible door into that all-male, never-never land in which he spent the rest of his life. For no one is more of a fantasist than the professional gambler, a man forever lost if he once admits there is a tomorrow.

Sam Bonnifield, the Yukon gold rush's most famous gambler, was then thirty, a tall, slim, handsome, quiet-spoken man. He was originally from West Virginia, but had worked for a few years at his trade in the Kansas cowtowns before going on to the North. Westbrook Pegler, who met him thirty-one years later in Chicago at the second Dempsey-Tunney fight, described him as a "quiet, almost deferential old man whose eyes were fascinating . . . so blue and clear and unfaded . . ."

For better or for worse, Rickard accepted Bonnifield as his model. And the West Virginian was that incongruity in the profession, an honest man, the fact being that honest professional gamblers are rare enough to be regarded as freaks.

To be this sort of gambler requires other qualities besides the gift for sensing ahead of others the ever-changing tides of luck, sometimes rhythmical, sometimes not. The gambler must have the oxlike sort of patience to wait for the rumble inside his head that calls the turn. He has to peel off emotion from his thinking, to concentrate as though there was nothing on earth but these cards or dice or spinning roulette wheel, and the men around him.

All that, and whatever else an honest gambler requires to win like a man and lose like a champion, Tex Rickard had.

As a crooked blackjack dealer in a southern California beach

town said recently, "Good Christ! It is hard enough to make a living at this racket cheating. I'd starve to death if I ever started playing on the level."

Tex also got the curious idea in Circle City that all business should and could be run in much the same way as Jack McQuesten ran his trading post there. McQuesten, a huge and hearty man with a large blond mustache, had been trading with Indian fur trappers up and down the Yukon for a quarter-century when Tex first met him. Before coming to the valley, the middle-aged McQuesten had survived enough adventures to fill a half-dozen action-crammed novels, first as a boy sailing before the mast, then as a young frontiersman fighting in Oregon's Indian wars.

His partner, Al Mayo, who began life as a circus acrobat, had charge of the steamboat end of their business. Between them, they established most of the fur-trading posts on the river—Fort Reliance, Forty Mile, and Fort Yukon. As commission agents for the Alaska Commercial Company, McQuesten and Mayo held what amounted to a monopoly on all the pre-gold-rush business done in the valley with Indians and early mining prospectors.

McQuesten worked on the theory that every man was honest, and gave credit to all comers. Occasionally a prospector he had grubstaked a year before would come to his trading post to explain that though he had enough gold dust to pay off he had not been on a spree for months. Jack always understood that. "Go have your spree," he'd say, "and pay me whatever you have left."

Sometimes the miner, with head hung low, would return a few days later to say he had been having such a great binge he'd used up all his gold dust. McQuesten's answer to that was, "All right, now let's get together the stuff you need for next year. But when you come back I'll have to have *something* on your bill."

It is unusual to find a book about the Klondike that fails to describe both the love of the Indians for McQuesten, and his famous thermometer. The thermometer consisted of four vials, standing side by side in a rack. The first held quicksilver, the second whisky, the third kerosene, the fourth "Perry Davis Pain Killer."

They froze in that order.

When the patent medicine named for Mr. Davis started turning solid, everybody ran to his cabin, leaped into his bunk with all

his clothes on, and piled everything but the door and his Yukon stove on top of him.

Working in Sam Bonnifield's Circle City shack, Tex began getting his basic training in high-powered gambling almost immediately. During his first week there, he did everything from running the craps table to sweeping up. He also watched the West Virginian deal a card in a faro game on which \$10,000 was riding. Louis (Goldie) Golden, another no-limit gambler, had bet \$5,000 bucking the tiger, on the queen.

Faro, long the most popular gambling game in America, is almost as simple to play as Old Maid. This, however, is not the reason it has vanished from gambling houses from coast to coast. It is also the game which gives the customer the closest to a fifty-fifty chance of winning. In betting \$5,000 in gold dust on the queen, Goldie Golden was wagering that whenever that pasteboard lady appeared in a turn, it would be the second of the pair of cards Bonnifield, the dealer, would draw from the box. If the queen came out first, the house would win.

The queen, when one was finally dealt, turned up second, winning \$5,000 in gold dust for Goldie. Bonnifield did not even look up. "Tex," he called over to Rickard at the table, "if Goldie is quitting, pay him off. Five thousand dollars comes to a little over nineteen pounds and a half in dust. Oh, hell, give him an even twenty pounds!"

"Who's quittin'?" demanded Goldie in a hurt voice, and took the pay-off in yellow, hundred-dollar chips. Before he left, at four o'clock the next morning, he had lost the \$5,000, and \$17,000 more.

Three nights later Tex saw Bonnifield lose \$72,000 in gold dust, and the gambling shack as well, in a poker game. Sam was about to turn over the premises to the winner when a friend came in with a couple of heavy gold pokes which he put at Bonnifield's disposal. In six hours Bonnifield had his fortune and shack back, and also had cleaned out the customer.

If Rickard did not bring Sam Bonnifield good luck, the West Virginian thought he did. Within a month after Tex started to work for him, Bonnifield had enough gold dust on hand to buy the big-

gest, flashiest-looking place in town. In a typical gambler's gesture he turned over to Tex his old shack, its craps and roulette tables, chips, cards, and stock of liquor.

When the astonished Rickard asked why Bonnifield was doing that for him, Sam said, "You're a born gambler, Tex, and I think you'll stay an honest one." And he held out his smooth-as-silk hands, adding, "Look at these hands, my young friend. They are my tools. When you first came to work for me you said something about going prospecting after a while. After you got a stake, I think was the way you put it.

"I got only one thing to say about that: Either be a gold miner or a gambler. You can't be both. No man's hands can do rough work and handle cards or dice as a gambler has to every day. With hands like mine a man can concentrate on the game because his hands work almost by themselves."

For the rest of his life Tex Rickard gambled as though Sam Bonnifield were looking over his shoulder. But he didn't yet know his percentages as well as he thought he did.

In less than two weeks he lost the gambling house Bonnifield had given him. Tex shook hands with the customer who had won it, wished him luck. Then he put on his fur parka, walked down the street to Sam's fancy new joint, and asked Bonnifield for his old job back again. Sam put him behind the bar.

The old sourdoughs agree that Tex was a good man behind the bar, but a better man in front of it. "Great talker," they say. "Sure had the gift of gab, that feller." Of course, no greater tribute could be paid to Rickard's genius for listening. Whenever you run into survivors of the gold rush who knew Tex, you will hear that same thing. Nothing can persuade them that this was merely because he had hung on their every word with such utterly intense absorption in the joints of Circle City, Dawson, Rampart, and Nome.

It is a matter that sends Eddie Borden, who was Tex Rickard's office boy in Madison Square Garden, into a seething rage every time the subject is mentioned. Eddie has been a New York sports writer, boxing manager, promoter of fights on two continents, and currently runs several boxing and wrestling magazines. Long association with the schemers of Jacobs Beach has almost completely

immunized him to all sorts of shock, surprise, and disappointment in a pal. But anyone who mentions what a clever conversationalist Rickard was brings Eddie close to hysteria.

"How can they say that?" he demanded. "I hung around him nights for at least five years, hoping to hear him say one word that would teach me something about the boxing business. I figured that sooner or later he would have to give out with a secret. But Tex was a man who never had two sentences to rub together in his whole life. And he was always like that, Circle City to Coney Island and back!"

If you ask Eddie Borden why he becomes so explosive only on this single unimportant matter, he exclaims:

*"Unimportant! My God! Do you realize I was just a young feller then? I might have been taking out nice-looking girls all those nights."*

Tex's gift for listening met the acid test during his first year in Circle City, where jokes were endlessly repeated about the weather, McQuesten's thermometer, and what eventually came to be known as the Great Fur Controversy.

This concerned conflicting theories of whether fur worn on the inside of a coat was warmer than fur worn outside. Unable to endure more on the subject, Harry Ash, the saloonkeeper, ended the marathon argument late that December by asking:

"Do you suppose God would have taken the trouble to put the fur on the outside of animals if He thought they would be warmer with the fur inside their skin?"

One afternoon early in January, Arthur Walden, who carried the mail through the valley by dog sled, brought into Ash's saloon letters that told of the most exciting event in the Yukon's history.

The mail was usually distributed by either McQuesten or Walden himself, who would stand on a box and call off the name written on the envelope. Usually the prospector would shuffle up, pay the dollar in gold dust the drivers charged for delivering each letter, then stand staring at the envelope, half afraid to open it.

Some of them had not heard from their homes and families for years. If the news was bad, the bearded miner would burst into uncontrollable tears and walk quickly out of the place. Good



news brought smiles, and also occasionally tears. For to some it was a heart-rending thing to learn of what had happened long before to their families from scraps of paper that had come thousands of miles by wagon, train, ship, and dog sled.

But this time the bulk of the mail Walden brought in was for men who had partners working claims in other parts of the valley. The dog driver walked in that afternoon, threw his letters on the bar and asked Harry Ash for a cup of beef tea. Though in the Yukon less than a year, Walden had already learned that whisky was liquid dynamite to a man handling a dog team over a trail.

That day Walden never got his beef tea.

Thumbing swiftly through the letters, Harry Ash found one from a miner he had grubstaked to a year's supplies in exchange for half of the man's claim. As he read the letter, Ash's eyes almost popped.

"Big strike on the Klondike," he yelled. "They're getting more than sixty dollars a pan down there!"

With that, he jumped over the bar and told everybody, "Boys, help yourselves to the whole shooting match. I'm off to the Klondike."

Near madness followed. The enchanted barflies didn't wait to uncork the bottles but knocked off the necks and drank with the jagged glass edges tilted to their lips. Other men with partners working the creeks near the Klondike looked in the pile for their letters, then followed Ash out of the saloon. They wished to lose no time in starting for the area where the great strike had been made. This they supposed must be near the junction of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers, in Canadian territory, 300 miles south of Circle City.

The news of the great strike spread like wildfire all over town. Within a few minutes prospectors, in their eagerness for the details of the magnificent bonanza, were making such an uproar all around Walden, that he could hardly make himself heard.

The strike actually had been made during the summer, on August 17, by George Carmack, a squaw man, and his two Siwash Indian brothers-in-law, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie.

As the discoverer of the new gold field Carmack was permitted by law to stake out two claims instead of one. He called these

"Discovery" and "One Below." Skookum Jim staked "One Above," and Tagish Charlie "Two Below." Each claim was supposed to run for 500 feet along the creek bottom, from rimrock to rimrock, in width. Nobody, then or later, ever underestimated his 500 feet, and when the surveyors for Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, came along later, they took over in the name of the Crown the extra areas claimed illegally. These were called "the Queen's fractions," and the mere sight of them inspired disrespectful thoughts in miners otherwise devoted to Her Majesty.

Leaving Skookum Jim behind to guard the claims, Carmack and Tagish Charlie started out for Forty Mile to register them. Carmack told everyone they met along the way—this meant about six prospectors—of their great fortune.

On reaching that mining town, Siwash George boasted to everybody in Bill McPhee's saloon of his strike, but because of his reputation as a great yarner, few believed him. This even though he showed them the samples of flaky gold which he and Tagish Charlie had brought with them. But a few of them later went down to Rabbit Creek—which soon was renamed, and quite properly, Bonanza Creek. And a handful of the other men who had been grubstaked by Harry Ash, Jack McQuesten, and others drifted there gradually. It was from this latter group that the news had come to Ash's saloon.

Within the next forty-eight hours a thousand things seemed to be happening simultaneously in Circle City. The standard price for cabins had been \$500 and they'd been renting for \$15 a month. But now they were being offered for \$25 each, because of the impending mass evacuation, and finding no buyers. On the other hand, the price of sled dogs rose from between \$25 and \$50 each to as much as \$1,500.

While everyone in town was getting ready for the race through 300 miles of wilderness to the Klondike gold fields, Phil McQuade, the Irish prospector, lost a pet animal which he had broken to harness for just such an emergency.

The pet was a male moose which had wandered as a calf into Circle City and been adopted by the sentimental Irishman. On hearing of the strike, McQuade congratulated himself because all the love and affection he had lavished on the moose seemed about

to be rewarded. But while he was in his cabin checking his gear, a drunken free-loader staggered out of Harry Ash's saloon. On seeing the beloved moose peacefully tethered to McQuade's front door, he ran home for his Winchester and shot it for game. On discovering his slain pet, McQuade wept for ten minutes, then resumed his preparations for the trek.

When Harry Ash quit his bar on that exciting day, he went straight to Tex Rickard's cabin, woke him up to tell him the news, and asked him to make the trip with him. While the others were drinking, Ash and Rickard were buying up the ten best sled dogs in town. In the excitement Tex, needless to say, forgot Bonnifield's warning words about keeping his hands soft and flexible.

Two days later Ash and Tex, with their dog team, led the way to the Klondike. They traveled over the frozen river, followed by the other prospectors with full ten-dog teams, then by those with successively smaller teams. Some prospectors had only one dog. Last to hit the trail were the men who had to drag their own sleds. Except for a handful of people, Circle City within forty-eight hours more became a deserted town. Even the whores, a hardy lot, had hit the trail along with their best customers.

Each man on that unprecedented trek knew he would be unable to get any more food for eight months, when the river ice would break up and the steamers would get through with fresh provisions. Arthur Walden, the dog driver, pointed out that it was impossible for a man to haul enough food to live on for eight months. "How they got through... God alone knows," he wrote of the men who made the trip. "They were all the pick of the pack, and that counted."

Many who risked their lives in that race struck it rich. More than one of them became a millionaire. As it turned out, the surface gold Carmack discovered was not nearly so valuable as the great wealth that lay from 10 to 14 feet below the surface.

But it was hell to get out. In certain other parts of Alaska it was possible to work a claim during the summer. But the moose pasture that became Bonanza Creek was covered with moss 18 inches deep, and after the late spring thaw came, the ground there became too treacherous and dangerous underfoot to work on.

Only primitive equipment was available that winter, though the

means and know-how for thawing the ground by using steam were introduced there the following year.

When Rickard and Harry Ash reached Bonanza Creek, most of the best claims had already been staked by men out of Forty Mile. But Tex managed to acquire a piece of the No. 3 and No. 4 claims below Discovery, and worked them for grueling months that winter. The miners had to excavate the ore-bearing rock 20 feet down. But first it was necessary to thaw the ground. This was done by building a wood fire that heated the ground enough to loosen it to a depth of 2 feet. This earth would then be shoveled away, after which the whole process was repeated until the hard shale 20 feet or so below the surface was uncovered. If the diggers were lucky they hit a pay streak. If not, they either started tunneling from there or began burning out another deep hole.

On hitting pay dirt the gold hunters brought up the ore-bearing rock to the surface in buckets and dumped it on the frozen earth. It lay there until the spring thaw which brought the water required for sluicing out the gold.

Tex didn't enjoy this backbreaking work any more than the other prospectors did. When he got his chance to sell out his share in the two claims for \$60,000 to Maj. Neville A. D. Armstrong, a British investor, and another man, he jumped at it. He had only one idea, to get back home and buy a ranch near Henrietta. Hearing that Circle City was waking up once more, he went there to have a little fun before the river opened up. He planned to take the first river steamer out for Saint Michael, at the mouth of the Yukon, and then continue on to Texas. But he had only been back in Circle a couple of weeks when he met Tom Turner, whom he had known in Juneau.

Turner was tremendously excited. After they'd had a drink together, he told Rickard that Dawson, which he had just left, was booming like nothing he had ever seen before.

"Even now you can see it's gonna be a much bigger place than Circle," said Turner. "Anyone with money enough to start a real good gambling house and saloon down there will have a gold mine."

"You've got yourself a partner, Turner," Tex told him. And

they sealed their deal with a handshake and a round of drinks for the house.

The other man's few well-chosen words had sent Rickard's ranch plan up in smoke. Even that early in his life Tex could not resist a gamble.

When they got to Dawson, at the junction of the Klondike and the Yukon Rivers, they found a booming tent town that was already bigger than Circle City. In a few days they had their place up, furnished with gambling equipment and supplied with liquor. Tex named it "The Northern."

From the day The Northern opened, the partners did a land-office business. After four months they had \$155,000 in the till.

But one night a half-dozen prospectors from Circle came in and started playing roulette. They concentrated on Nos. 17 and 23, and also played the middle twelve numbers, 13 to 24. The newcomers couldn't seem to do anything wrong. It was just one of those nights.

"Whenever they lost they just piled on more dust and told us to roll the ball," Rickard said. "We rolled ourselves right out of house and home that night. At the same time other customers were taking us good at faro. I'd put the fifty-seven thousand dollars I had left over from my Bonanza-strike money into that place, along with plenty of Turner's dough. That night we lost the whole joint, and every nickel we had in the world."

When Tex walked out of his Dawson gambling house that night he didn't have a place to sleep. And, as he said, it was getting colder.

# 5

## Rickard's real education begins

TEX SPENT the next fifteen months working as a twenty-dollar-a-day bartender, faro dealer, and front man in various Dawson pleasure palaces. During most of that time he was a fixture at the Monte Carlo. This was a combined saloon, gambling house, and theater which "Swiftwater Bill" Gates had started. Whenever asked what the limit was at his gambling tables, Swiftwater Bill, the Klondike's most celebrated spendthrift, would cry gleefully, "The sky's the limit, boys. Tear the roof off."

Harry Ash and a partner named Manning had taken over the place by the time Tex got his job there. Under Ash and Manning there was a limit on bets. Unless coaxed and pleaded with, they held players down to \$1,000 per throw at their craps table. They also discouraged poker pots that ran over the \$5,000 mark.

As far as Tex's worldly education was concerned those fifteen months were the most important of his career. Though he was drawing down \$20 a day, Tex often went to bed hungry. Even in a red-hot boom town like Dawson this is not easy for anyone except a professional gambler to do so frequently. But Tex stubbornly kept betting every grain of gold dust he was paid—there

was no other currency in circulation in Dawson—on faro, and the cards kept refusing to be good to him.

Rickard's year and a quarter of uninterrupted insolvency included the summer when crooked gamblers in force swept into Dawson with the successive waves of gold rushers. And they all seemed to be making money hand over fist. The Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police did their best to stop the use of loaded dice, shaved or pricked cards, and fixed faro boxes. But a crooked gambler can operate quite efficiently without these gimmicks when he has to. He can shuffle a deck ten times, have it cut by the sucker ten times, and still throw the fifty-two cards out in the precise order he wishes to. Being what he was, Tex Rickard, even while surrounded by larceny in Dawson, remained both honest and also true to his Westerner's code of live and let live. If he was shocked or even disturbed by the constant swindling that went on nightly in the various places where he worked, he never betrayed it.

Dawson was then so remote from civilization that it was almost a full year before news of George Carmack's magnificent strike reached the outside world.

The first batch of Klondike prospectors to arrive in the States—with shining nuggets, pokes full of gold dust, and ear-to-ear grins—had come to San Francisco on July 14, 1897, aboard the *Excelsior*. But that city's usually alert newsmen were, for once, caught with their noses for news down, due to a local bubonic-plague scare that temporarily made the arrival of a treasure ship unimportant.

But two days later another ship, the *Portland*, docked at Seattle with more bearded prospectors and what one reporter described as "a ton of gold!" From Seattle's Skid Road that electrifying phrase rolled across a nation prostrate from four years of grim depression and around a world suffering at the moment from a gold shortage.

One Klondike expert, Pierre Berton, asserts that the news ended the depression within a week! Even conservative economists agree it was the medicine that helped mightily and quickly to restore prosperity in every corner of the United States. As Mark Sullivan wrote in *Our Times*, the news "stirred men's imagination to an

extravagance second only to the discovery in California fifty years before."

There was that great allure, of course, to a generation of Americans reared on the get-rich-quick folklore of the forty-niners, Cripple Creek, Tombstone, and the Comstock Lode. The fanciful and the greedy alike were roused to the same high pitch of enthusiasm.

And why not?

At first, the newspapers said the nuggets were as big as peas. A few days later they had grown the size of potatoes. Some Canadian officials issued statements that indicated getting rich in the Klondike amounted to little more than getting there rapidly enough with a pick and shovel. The governor of the Northwest Territory in Canada declared that the Dominion's part of the Yukon alone had "nine thousand miles of golden waterways."

On hearing the magical "ton of gold" phrase men who had been unemployed for years started packing. They dug out the family rainy-day bankrolls from wherever they had hidden them, in the cookie jar, behind the loose brick in the chimney, in the hole in the back yard, in the mattresses where they had been sewed for safety.

Others who had been struggling to hold jobs that paid \$2 for a ten-hour day were inflamed by stories that carpenters, blacksmiths, and common laborers in Dawson were earning \$15 to \$20 a day. Men who had lost all hope of ever getting rich went to get that easy money. So did thousands of Casper Milquetoasts who had never before dared leave the house without an umbrella on a cloudy day.

In Seattle the mayor resigned and half of his policemen and firemen turned in their badges to race to the new El Dorado. In Chicago a whole crowd of professional gamblers moved toward the North with their faro layouts, gimmicked roulette wheels, loaded dice, and marked cards. A Pittsburgh man advertised plans for a matrimonial agency in the Klondike. He said he intended to transport there only New England maidens of the highest character who would brighten the frozen gold fields with their well-cooked meals and sedate ways. In Brooklyn several Norwegian families



pooled their life savings to charter a small vessel in which they sailed around South America and up the Pacific Coast.

And this daffy sort of thing was happening everywhere; in the United States, and abroad, in Norway and as far off as New Zealand. Warnings about the "starvation winter in Dawson," the menacing climate, the difficulties of getting there only seemed to increase the would-be prospectors' eagerness to be off and running. Nothing could stop them—they mortgaged their homes, deserted their families, quit their jobs, postponed their weddings.

They bought their stuff, started off, jammed every seaport along the Pacific Coast. Many of them were swindled before they ever left their home towns. Others were trimmed, and picked clean, in Seattle, San Francisco, Juneau, Dyea, Skagway, Saint Michael, and everywhere else they were forced to wait before continuing north.

Altogether a million men in 1897 and 1898, it is estimated, started for Dawson. For that matter there were quite a few women of the type then regarded as "the better kind" who kicked over the traces back home and headed north. Only forty thousand of these million men and women ever reached Dawson that year or the next when the boom achieved its crest. And the tragedies that overwhelmed these other hundreds of thousands of men and women who never got there is, of course, the great unwritten story of the Klondike gold rush.

That winter of 1897-1898, in the town they were trying so desperately to reach, men who loved their dogs were shooting and eating them on the sly. Indignant gold miners were holding meetings demanding that the saloonkeepers, gamblers, and other "nonproducers" be sent back immediately.

If those useless ones died of privation and hunger on the way, the angry miners said, it did not matter. American newspapers meanwhile continued running stories about Dawson's "starvation winter."

With so many thousands of newcomers in town, the Dominion's officials in Dawson had foreseen this situation long before the freeze-up came. They sent away everyone who would go. "Flee for your lives!" was the advice given the many homeless and destitute

newcomers who had made it only to find all the best claims already staked out.

The officials gave a three months' supply of food and equipment to 900 persons who agreed to walk back to Dyea. Meanwhile, at Forty Mile, to the north of Dawson, other officials were turning back the people who kept arriving on every boat from Saint Michael. In the south, at Lake Bennett, the Mounties were holding up another horde of gold-maddened men who insisted they had to get to Dawson regardless of the 80-below weather they were warned would kill them on the trail.

For the editors of the day Dawson that winter became the once-in-a-lifetime running story that could be played in a different way every day: as melodrama, farce, breath-taking adventure, success story, or slapstick comedy.

In a single month, January, 1899, the *New York World*, printed between forty and fifty news items about the Klondike. Most of them concerned the life of Dawson itself, including its curious romances and elopements; various screwball schemes to relieve the "starvation" there or get future prospectors over Chilkoot Pass by balloon, aerial tramway, electric trolleys, and snow trains; and the frenzied plans Americans everywhere were making to join the headlong rush north by practicing sleeping nights in the deep snow, training their dogs for sled pulling, and falling prey to all kinds of fraudulent schemes.

One *World* Sunday feature was headlined:

#### MONKEYS WILL DIG KLONDIKE GOLD

"Captain Edward Moss, well-known clubman of London, millionaire owner of African gold mines," the story explained, expected to solve all the Far North's labor problems by sending monkeys who had been working very happily in his Transvaal gold fields.

Though it required four monkeys to do the work of one able-bodied man, Captain Moss pointed out that the simians did not know enough to steal, never grumbled about their aching backs, demanded no overtime, and were content to be recompensed entirely in bananas.

Captain Moss admitted that he had the problems of diet and

temperature to solve before shipping his monkeys north. He said he was training them to relish oily and fattening foods "such as the Eskimos eat." And on their way to the Klondike, he planned to have them stop off at London where his Bond Street tailor would make custom-made fur coats for them.

This spoof and others like it disturbed the British far less than the stories published about Dawson's "starvation winter." As it turned out, there was none. But it was a squeaker, far too close for comfort. Before the river opened up in May all the restaurants had closed, flour was \$1.50 a pound (with none obtainable), and the Mounted Police had every last bean and bit of bacon rind under strict rationing.

During the spring of '98 the town's 10,000 population quadrupled. Some of it spilled over into Lousetown, two miles away, where some of the colony's most animated whores had established themselves.

The noise on Dawson's streets meanwhile had become deafening with howling dogs fighting one another, frightened horses neighing as they floundered flank-deep in the quagmire in front of the stores and new shacks being slammed together, day and night.

Wilson Mizner, then twenty-one, appeared in Dawson during the first week of June. It was typical of him to arrive when the restaurants were all open again (and serving better menus than before) and also when the chaos was at its height.

Young as he was then, the six-foot-three Mizner, whom Damon Runyon once characterized as "the greatest man about town any town ever had," had already been around and about more than somewhat. He had already lived in Central America, had worked as a spieler for a medicine show in Oregon, been a singer of sentimental ballads in the dives along San Francisco's Barbary Coast, and had tried his hand, as he boasted later, at both opium smoking and pimping.

One day this son of an aristocratic California family popped up behind the Monte Carlo bar. His section was next to Rickard's. The result was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between these two young celebrities-to-be from opposite ends of the social ladder. And why not? The best talker in the Western Hemisphere had met the perfect listener, a young man who hung on every word he

uttered and never interrupted Mizner's dazzling monologues except to go to the men's room.

Mizner's tales about his childhood gave Tex his first vicarious look into the upperworld of wealth and society of which, until then, he had been almost unaware.

But Tex also was intrigued by Mizner's accounts of ferocious street battles between the women of Dawson.

One of Tex's favorites was Mizner's blow-by-blow description of how Bertha the Adder pursued Seattle Emily all over the waterfront, throwing rocks at her and tearing off some more of her clothes each time she caught up with her.

Another was Mizner's tale of the encounter between Swiftwater Bill Gates's first wife, whose retroussé nose had won her the nickname of Nellie the Pig, and the girl song-and-dance team which billed itself the "Petite Sisters Pickering." When the Sisters Pickering sneered at her, Nellie the Pig kicked both of them so viciously in the shins that the girls had to eliminate the dance portion of their act for a month, and concentrate on singing such heart-rending ballads as "He Fought for a Cause He Thought Was Right" and "Love Makes the World Go Round."

The Monte Carlo was one of the most elaborate establishments in Dawson. Its saloon was in the front, and the gambling rooms and a dance hall-theater in the rear. Though there was plenty of gyping of customers being done by crooked bartenders in the saloon and in the dance hall-theater, gold dust was always weighed honestly in the gambling section, thanks to the Mounties.

In Dawson's saloons, each bartender weighed it on his own delicate scales. These sat before him on the bar and rested on a small square of carpet. First the bartender emptied the poke into a small V-shaped pan called a blower. From this he poured it onto the scales. If not enough gold dust clung to these, there remained the carpet, long fingernails, and hands wet with beer rags.

Both the saloon and gambling rooms stayed open twenty-four hours a day, but not the dance hall-theater, which opened at eight in the evening and closed at six in the morning—to save wear and tear on the girls.

The orchestra at the Monte Carlo and most of the other places consisted of four pieces—piano, violin, trombone, and cornet.

But as in all such clip joints, the musicians were chosen not because of their talent so much as for their endurance.

The evening's festivities usually started with a vaudeville show, a melodrama, or a card of prize fights. Then the chairs on the main floor were pushed back to make room for the dancing. There was a narrow balcony, three or four rows deep. From this men who didn't have money enough to dance with the house girls could look down at the couples waltzing, square-dancing, or doing quadrilles. One dance cost a dollar, and all the numbers were short. After a number it was considered bad form not to rush your partner to the music hall's bar for a fast whisky for yourself and a shot of colored water for her. By midnight the spilling of customers' gold dust by the bartenders there increased in direct proportion with the individual customer's drunkenness.

The girls did very well. They got \$50 a week, and a 25-cent bonus for each fake drink they consumed. And every night the more prankish prospectors kept dropping nuggets down the back or front of their dresses to test their ticklishness.

But the music-hall ladies who did best of all were those who became companions for the evening of prospectors who had struck it rich enough to hire one of the dozen curtained boxes. These were built off the stage with six on each side. The night the Monte Carlo opened, one such man spent \$1,700 on champagne. It cost \$40 a quart. The girl with him got a bonus of \$4 per bottle on each one consumed, and the same on each bottle of sugared soda water served the hot spender when he was drunk enough not to notice the difference. The curtains on these boxes could be drawn close, which permitted the beauties in them to perform any service required of them.

After working at the Monte Carlo for a while, Mizner talked the management into permitting him to run the stage shows and boxing cards in the dance hall. Rickard, getting his first look at an embryo showman at work, was all eyes and ears.

Mizner remembered that his greatest success in getting a real belly laugh out of Tex came the night he put on a heavyweight fight.

The contestants were Bust Hansen, a huge Swede, and Sunny Barber, the nephew of Nettie, Mizner's Negro maid, whom he had

imported from Skagway on Nettie's assurance that Sunny was a future world champion. Mizner had built up interest in the contest in advance by telling everybody that Sunny was sure to knock the Swede for a loop. Bust Hansen had won all his local fights until then, but almost everybody in Dawson hated the Swedes because they were forever striking it rich in claims other miners had abandoned.

The hope of seeing Hansen knocked out was so widespread that Bill took over the large dining room of the Dominion Hotel to put on the bout. Mizner and Tex saw the fight from ringside seats. A roar of approval that rocked the hotel went up when Sunny jumped into the ring and started impatiently shadowboxing in his corner.

But when Hansen, who weighed 228 and was built like an old-fashioned bank vault, stepped through the ropes, Sunny Barber took one look at him and turned green. During the first round Sunny backpedaled all the way. In the second round Hansen solved what Mizner described as the Negro's "spinning halfback" maneuvers, and slugged him on the chin. Nettie's nephew fell through the ropes and right into the promoter's lap. Rickard, though he had lost his bet on Barber, laughed until the tears came.

There were several good fighters in Dawson that year, including Frank Slavin, the Sydney Cornstalk. Swiftwater Bill Gates and Joe Boyle, later the favorite of Queen Marie of Rumania, brought Slavin north with another fighter named Raphael to put on exhibitions. But the four of them had become more interested in the larger profits of gold mining.

One night Slavin got drunk in the Monte Carlo and was being punched around by a local bully boy named Biff Hoffman. With an anguished cry, Mizner jumped between them and arranged for them to continue their grudge battle in the ring. They agreed, and a few nights later he put them on in the dance hall.

With Slavin in a grudge fight as his attraction, Mizner charged \$15 for balcony and the rear main-floor seats, and \$25 for the front rows. Major Armstrong, who had bought up one of Rickard's claims in Bonanza Creek, was in the audience. In his memoirs the Major expressed his astonishment at seeing the Sydney Cornstalk go into action in the ring on the small stage dressed in long white

trousers and a heavy sweater with a rolled-up collar. Biff Hoffman, however, wore conventional boxing trunks.

Despite being so overdressed by ring standards Slavin knocked out Hoffman with his first punch.

But Tex missed a unique fight between Slavin and Frank Gotch, later the world wrestling heavyweight champion. At the moment Gotch was boxing in Dawson under the name of Kennedy.

The Sydney Cornstalk was cutting up Gotch so badly that Gotch lost his temper and forgot that he had agreed to confine himself to fistic assaults. Clamping a half nelson on Slavin, he angrily threw him over the ropes and out of the ring.

Taken completely by surprise, the referee was about to award the fight to Gotch when Slavin protested from the floor.

"I'm the winner, old chap. Because he didn't knock me out of the ring with his fists."

Confronting the enraged Gotch in the ring and the scowling Slavin, just outside of the ropes, the referee, intent on keeping his bone structure unaltered, yelled:

"No contest!"

# 6

## The first big jackpot

TEX MISSED the boxing-wrestling what-is-it between the Sydney Cornstalk and Frank Gotch because he had left Dawson in that fall of 1898 to open a gambling saloon of his own at Rampart, another just-born gold-boom river town. Rampart was downriver, past Circle City and the point where the capricious Yukon touches the Arctic Circle.

During the time Tex was in Dawson there had been a hundred and one false-alarm stampedes to creeks all over the valley. There was always a mob—called the pencil-and-hatchet crowd—of would-be prospectors hanging around the Gold Commissioner's office. When anyone registered a new claim anywhere this bunch would dash off, stake out a claim for themselves nearby, and slash or write their initials in the stick they propped up between stones. Then they would return, looking happy, to Dawson.

If they had the \$15 registration fee they paid it, then tried to peddle a half share for a winter's grub. If they didn't have \$15 they had to promote that money along with the grubstake.

Why Tex picked Rampart as the boomlet that would bring in the pay dirt, he never explained. But he had no trouble promoting the short bankroll he required for his modest setup. Even that



early Tex had developed the flair for obtaining financial backing. Incidentally, several well-informed persons—Scoop Gleeson, the San Francisco editor, being one—insist that Rickard made it all the way from Alaska to Madison Square Garden on what the promoter himself lovingly called O.P.M.—Other People's Money.

"Rickard was always the same," says D. E. Griffith, the well-known sourdough historian. "He was always broke. In Dawson he was literally in rags while making twenty dollars a day running a roulette wheel. He always operated on other people's money. But Tex was personable, had such a winning way that nobody could dislike him."

The picture this gives of a Tex Rickard as a promoter whose movement money came from backers is true, in part. At both Goldfield and New York Tex was as much front man as proprietor, and he had a whole series of partners in his one sensationally successful project in Alaska, The Northern, in Nome. However, it is difficult to see how anyone could run a twenty-four-hour-a-day gambling saloon without partners.

At Rampart, Tex was eager to try out some of the showman's tricks he had picked up from Mizner. Almost before he had the boards up for his bar, he nailed up on trees crudely scrawled signs that read GRAND OPENING, FEATURING A GRAND BALL AND PRIZE FIGHT.

It was in Rampart that Tex met Rex Beach. The twenty-one-year-old Beach was fascinated by Rickard, whom he described as a "slim, dark, likable fellow with a warm, flashing smile and a pleasing Southern accent. He could be friendly and animated, or as grim as an Apache. Tex had been raised in the cow country, and showed it."

Twenty-four years later, when Tex was in the saddest, cruelest trouble of his tumultuous life—on trial in a scandalous morals case—the best-selling novelist was one of a dozen famous and respected Americans who rushed across whole continents to testify in his defense.

Beach was in Rampart to prospect for gold. He attended that first prize fight Tex ever put on and reported that so many prospectors from the creeks attended that there was no room to put up a ring. There being no chairs, the miners formed a small circle

around the two bruisers. The pair slugged away, toe to toe. Whenever one of them was forced back, he bumped into the spectators, who pushed him at his opponent. The bout ended when one of the battlers was flung back at his opponent with his head down. The top of his head hit the other fellow's chin, knocking him out.

The music for the grand ball was provided by a mouth-organ virtuoso. There were few white women in the camp, but Tex had prevailed upon a few Siwash Indian squaws to attend. There were not enough to go around, so some of the miners pretended that they were women, and danced with their partners.

The opening was both a social and financial success. Unfortunately, the Rampart boom was a fast bust. That same year, Lt. Edwin Bell, of the U.S. Army Engineer Corps, spent some time there and made an official report which explains why Rampart, along with dozens of similar gold-boom towns, failed to fulfill its first flashy promise. The officer found that gold lay in paying quantities along six creeks near Rampart but that it required both engineering know-how and machinery to get it out. The cheechakos and sourdoughs in Rampart had neither.

That winter Rickard again did not have what track people call getaway money. Along with hundreds of other men, Tex lived in the wilderness until spring, chopping wood.

Rex Beach holed up in a nearby tent with two college boys from California. Tex spent the winter with three other marooned and gloomy fortune hunters in a 16- by 18-foot log cabin with a dirt floor. This was a shelter almost on the Iron Age level, but typical of the gold-rush cabins all over the Yukon. The table and bunks were nailed to one of the walls with two stout sticks for legs on the projecting side. The chairs were tree stumps.

The cabin's one tiny window was covered with deerskin and yielded no light. It was hard to heat and impossible to ventilate. Sanitation was never mentioned because none existed.

Years later, when asked whether he and his three companions often got spells of cabin fever that winter, Rickard grinned and said, "We couldn't afford to fight. We were living there on credit. Every bean and sourdough flapjack, each scrap of bacon and drop of tea we et in all those months was one hundred per cent on the cuff.

"When we needed light so we could eat, we lit a candle stub. We didn't mind sitting in the dark the rest of the time. After the first week we were sick of looking at each other. Maybe we should have et our grub off our tin plates in the dark too. It might have tasted better. But I wouldn't lay you eight to five on it."

Not even dewy-eyed sentimentalists can find good words to say for the gold washers' cooking. They were always too hungry and impatient to cook their beans properly. As a result, dysentery was all but universal in the Yukon.

Tex, Rex, and the other wood choppers expected vastly increased river traffic in May. Before the rush three or four wood-burning stern-wheel steamers were enough to supply the entire Yukon Valley. Now, everyone said, there would be more than thirty, crammed with passengers and carrying between 150 and 500 tons of freight.

The *Bella* and the *Alice*, the best known of the pre-rush steamers, drew only three and a half feet of water. Even so, they were not always able to keep afloat. The Yukon, in the fall, fell so rapidly that the little ships were forever running aground on sand bars.

In previous years the steamer pilots had been able to buy all the wood they needed from the Indians for \$4 to \$6 a cord. But the Indians were no longer available. They were getting exorbitant rates from fatigued gold-rushers for carrying their packs. It was expected that the new price for fuel wood, cut to fit into the steamers' boilers, would be \$15 a cord.

Rickard got that for the twenty cords he had cut during the winter. While he was loading the fuel on the boat, a deck hand told him, "I heared on the river that they struck it rich around Nome. A whole lot of 'em are packing and gitting out to the mountains around there."

Tex had never heard of Nome before. But the ship's skipper told him it was on Cape Nome, which was part of the Seward Peninsula.

"From here you have to go to Saint Michael first, then cross Norton Sound to get there," he said. "I've heard there is a big strike there but I don't know how they are going to land everything they need on that beach."

All that registered in Rickard's mind were the words "big

strike." After he hurriedly paid his debts in Rampart and got a steamboat ticket to Saint Michael, he had \$35 left. But on the boat he met Jim White, who had been a nightly customer in Tex's short-lived gambling saloon in Dawson. White also was going to Nome to prospect, though he confessed he was getting discouraged.

"I ain't yet staked one claim that was worth much," he said. "I'm beginning to think I'd have better luck in a gambling saloon like that one you ran in Dawson. The miners always liked to go there, Tex. They said it was like a club."

Rickard beamed. White, looking at him speculatively, said, "I know one thing. If I got myself such a place I'd have to have someone like you working with me, kinda teaching me the ropes."

"I only got thirty-five dollars to my name, Jim" said Tex. "When Tom Turner and me started the Dawson place I had fifty-seven thousand to throw in the pot. And Turner had plenty more."

White rubbed his chin and shrugged. "Well, I ain't got much more than thirty-five dollars myself," he said. "But I have got a big tent, and that's the main thing in a place just startin' to boom, like this Nome. If we could get up there and maybe get ourselves a few bottles of whisky on credit, all we'd need is wood enough for our floor and the land to set it up on."

"You've dealt me in, Jim," said Rickard with a grin.

Sports historians agree that Tex Rickard's promotion of the 1921 fandango called the Dempsey-Carpentier fight was his most brilliant operation.

Viewed in retrospect, however, it seems no more remarkable than his pyramiding of a \$21 bankroll—it had shrunk to that before he got to Nome—into a half-ownership in The Northern there that brought him \$100,000 during its first year, and \$500,000 altogether in the four years he retained a big piece of the place.

Few famous men ever hit their stride under more confusing circumstances. A conflict which at times verged on massed combat had erupted there even before Tex, his partner, and his partner's indispensable tent arrived. During the previous fall three miners from Golovin Bay, sixty miles away, had investigated reports of gold deposits along the creeks there.

When the reports turned out to be true, forty men staked out,

against all existing territorial laws, a mineral empire for themselves, covering twenty-five square miles in the peninsula's southeast corner. They named this the Cape Nome Mining District.

But all winter long miners, hearing rumors of the strike, streamed in from all parts of the valley, mostly in teams of two driving dog sleds. By May, the month before Tex's arrival, there were 250 of these seasoned old sourdoughs, angrily disputing the ownership rights of the original forty pioneers to the entire gold-loaded area.

They had held miners' meetings to declare the rights vacated, but these were broken up by a detachment of soldiers sent over from the fort at Saint Michael. The miners resented the military interference, but there were no civil authorities they could appeal to. They had taken to guarding their claims back in the hills with their Winchesters.

Civil strife, as one observer put it, was threatening to break out at any moment. If it did, it would be armed conflict under weather conditions that would make Valley Forge seem a June picnic on the Vassar campus.

Mother Nature really outdid herself in the matter of disagreeableness at Nome, which was without a harbor and unprotected from the sea in any other way. Its beach was battered most of the year with everything from driftwood and ice floes 30 feet high, blood-chilling blasts that come bowling in from the Bering Sea and Siberia, and an occasional tidal wave.

The driftwood on the beach—tangled up with every sort of debris the frozen sea had cast up—was the only wood in sight. Back of the beach lay endless soggy tundras, treeless as any desert.

And even during the ice-free months, Nome was no beauty spot. Torrential summer rains drenched it almost daily, converting the spongelike tundra into quagmire as treacherous as Dawson's Front Street in mid-July.

But it was in this most inhospitable corner of God's good earth that Rickard made his first great parlay of luck and opportunity. Tex's first bit of luck lay in getting to Nome while there were only a few dozen tents up. These were strung along the sand spit lying between the open sea and the narrow Snake River.

If Tex and his partner had arrived a few weeks later they would have been unable to get a good lot for their tent. As it was, they

were able to buy one for \$100 on Front Street, Nome's pleasure-house and business street, with a few dollars' option money.

Then, the day after getting to Nome, Rickard went down to the beach to find wood for the tent's floor. Everything there was hopelessly messed up with other debris.

But at the beach he saw a man unloading planks from a raft, and asked if he could spare enough for the tent floor. The man looked him over, rubbed his chin, and said, "Well, I am going to leave this wood here. Suppose you just pick out what you want and use it?"

Tex said that he and his partner were a little short of cash at the moment. "Why, you can take what you need and pay for it later," the man told him.

Tex thanked him and got Jim White down there in a hurry. In two days they had hammered together a good solid floor. Tex told Jim White, "I reckon I'll go visiting down at the beach again. Might find another friendly feller who has his helping hand out."

That day he saw a boat unloading whisky, wine, and brandy. As Tex explained to his partner later, "When I told the feller we had a tent with enough room to store them he seemed mighty grateful."

"All right," the man had replied, "you store the stuff for me. And if you want to use any of it, just keep tab on it, and we can settle next time I come back to Nome."

The next man Tex met was George Murphy, a cigar salesman. He was taken in as a partner on the strength of his panatelas and a modest bankroll.

Five days later, on July 4, Rickard staged his grand opening of The Northern in Nome. "We sold whisky at fifty cents a drink," said Tex, "and the roulette wheel and the faro bank opened under proper auspices. Miners came in from miles around. That was a gala day in my life and also a big day in the social life of Nome. Our gross receipts, at the bar alone, were \$935 on opening day.

"I was working behind the bar and one of my first customers that day was an old fellow with long whiskers. He came up to me and said, 'Fill 'em up, boy!' and he waved to the crowd, meanin' he wanted to buy drinks for the house.

"All drinks were fifty cents a throw, and you could have whisky, gin, brandy, or wine. The old man slapped a small poke on the

bar and untied the string. 'Weigh her up,' he said, 'and let's have another one.' The tab for them two rounds came to about fifty dollars. I weighed his poke for him. He had more than five pounds of gold dust in that little poke, which come to nearly twelve hundred dollars. When that prospector went out, he said, 'Put the rest of it away for me, boy.' Now he had never seed me before, remember. That was the way we did business up there then in Alaska.

"Business kept on being so strong during that week or two that White sold out his piece of the business for ten thousand dollars ten days after we opened.

"But that old man, the first to leave his poke with me in my Nome place, never come back. He went into the mountains, or up some creek. We never heard of him again. Very few prospectors ever left an address. Sometimes they didn't even leave their names on their pokes."

One night Tex watched a bearded old sourdough go up to his bartender and after a short conversation walk away. The old man retired to a bench and sat there, holding his head between his hands.

"What did he want?" Tex asked the bartender.

"He's broke, and he asked for another free drink. I gave him two already."

"And you turned him down, did you?" asked Tex. Giving the bartender a disgusted look, Rickard walked over to the prospector. "What's the matter, old-timer, haven't you got any money?"

"Nope—flat broke. Lost it all last night, I reckon."

"No, you're not broke," Rickard told him. "I've got your gold. You gave it to me last night to put in the safe."

Tex found the poke and handed it to him. The prospector had three or four thousand dollars worth of gold dust in it but had forgotten all about it.

"He was a very grateful old man," explained Tex. "It would have been all the same if it hadn't been there. He didn't know and never would have kicked. In a few minutes he was buying for the house again. Finally he wandered out into the cold.

"Six months later the old man came in and he was worth two hundred thousand dollars. He had made one of the strikes. Yes, and he left a lot of *that* with me, too."

Tex seemed to take as much pride in the trust the miners placed in him as in his gambling saloon's success. Incidentally, The Northern was the only saloon never held up in that lawless town.

As the cynical Mizner remarked, "You can't write off the fact that there were many desperate and vicious men in Nome that winter. Yet, in these surroundings Rickard was a man who could be trusted under all conditions. His back bar was always piled with miners' pokes. No other place parked so many pokes filled with gold, but Rickard's place never was raided though the others were held up right along. Gold on Rickard's back bar was like gold in the bank. In fact, Rickard was Nome's banker."

It was also Tex Rickard's luck to have set up his gambling tent only a few days before gold was discovered lying on the Nome Beach a few steps away. Two men found the gold simultaneously. One of them was John Hummel, a miner who was bathing there, hoping to find in the water a cure for scurvy.

The other man was a soldier from Saint Michael. He went into The Northern and handed Rickard a torn envelope in which he had dropped the grains of gold dust he had picked up on the beach.

"Weigh that for me, will you?" he asked Tex.

In the corner of the envelope Rickard saw a small amount of pure flour gold, which is the finest of all golds. Tex put it on the scales, and it weighed out at 60 cents.

"Where did you get that?" Tex asked.

"Why, down on the beach," the soldier said. "I was fooling around and saw some of it on the clay-bed rock. Just for fun I washed it out. 'Mount to anything?'"

In no time at all a dozen men were crowded around him, looking at the pinch of flour gold. Then they all dashed out, and down to the beach. Within two days Tex had lost his bartenders, his roulette stick men, and faro dealers.

That week anyone could go down to the beach and rock out gold. All he needed was a sort of small, boxlike dish tray on rockers that could be moved backward and forward to wash out the dirt from the gold. The soldier had started the Nome Beach strike. For months the miners had been going back into the hills after



camping on the beach where gold dust lay for miles in both directions.

And the beach was 25 miles long, and averaged about 200 feet in width.

The soldier's news had also stripped every other business establishment in Nome of its employees. Carpenters put down their hammers, sailors jumped ship, the bars and brothels were deserted by their regular customers. Everybody in town hurried down to the beach with pans, rockers, and other equipment. The claims along the creeks, the gullies, and gulches in the back hills were deserted. There was continual fighting for the best spots on the beach.

Before long two thousand prospectors were working the beach. The luckiest of them found it easy to pan out between \$20 and \$100 daily. During the first two delirious months that summer a million dollars in gold was washed out of those sands. After that the beach became the poor man's El Dorado and last chance. In all, an additional million in gold came out of the beach, including \$40,000 that was produced on a single claim during three days of fabulous sluicing.

When the pickings on the beach stopped being lush, miners resumed chasing each other all over the Seward Peninsula, which is about the size of New York State, looking for a prospect. And the real wealth proved to lie back there in the gulches of those barren, craggy, tundra-covered hills. The U.S. Assay Office reported that \$2,400,000 worth of gold was produced in the Nome area in 1899, and almost twice that the following year. This rose to above \$7,000,000 in 1906, when efficient machinery replaced the pioneering prospectors' picks and shovels and rockers.

The Nome rush ranks among the most productive of the century. During the first two years of the boom there \$7,500,000 worth of gold was produced on the peninsula, and, up to 1906, \$34,247,000. The two greatest years of the '49 California rush—between 1851 and 1853—produced \$62,000,000 in gold. Forty million dollars came out of the Klondike during the two banner years between 1898 and 1900, and, over the decade including those years, \$118,725,000.

Nome could be reached directly by water from the States and more people came there than ever got to the Klondike. Forty thousand men and women arrived there by the summer of 1900 on 190 steamships and sailing vessels, fifteen thousand of them within two weeks. The tragedy was that not one out of ten of these newcomers knew anything about mining. Before long, five thousand persons were wandering the streets of Nome, hungry and homeless.

Nome was Dawson all over again, but without police or other authority. There were incidents that reminded Tex of the night the cowboys of Henrietta stole the Cambridge post office. Cabins on desirable townsites were hauled away to the tundra. Sometimes this happened with the owner inside. By the time he got back to his choice location he would find another cabin there.

There was not much he could do. Being in Alaska, he did not even have a congressman in Washington to write to. Judge Charles S. Johnson, United States district judge for Alaska, came up briefly from Juneau in 1899 and suggested that a "consent municipal government" be formed until Congress could pass suitable laws for the territory. The miners agreed, and on September 13 elected Thomas D. Cashel mayor, Key Pittman, the future United States Senator, as city attorney, among other necessary officials.

Not until June 9, 1900, did Congress pass the necessary laws to govern the territory, including one that established a thousand-dollar annual license fee for selling liquor, with each town permitted to exercise local option.

All persons in Nome interested in establishing law and order were relieved on July 19, 1900, when Judge Arthur H. Noyes arrived to take the bench in the newly created Second Judicial District of Alaska. He had served in a similar capacity in Minnesota and the Dakotas.

But on the ship Judge Noyes had met a friend, one Alexander McKenzie, representing a New York corporation called the Alaskan Gold Mining Company. Mr. McKenzie was also this firm's chief stockholder. En route the two held several interesting conversations.

On arriving at Nome His Honor and Mr. McKenzie wasted no time. Whenever there was a disputed claim, the judge appointed McKenzie receiver. Under this arrangement McKenzie could work

the mine while holding it, without rendering an account. The team pulled this swindle again and again. When the robbed miners obtained writs from San Francisco, the judge and his partner ignored them. But justice caught up with them, after many delays, in February, 1902. The judge was removed, and replaced by Judge Wickersham, who brought law and order to Nome for the first time.

Meanwhile McKenzie had been tried, convicted, and sentenced in San Francisco to a year in prison. The court called the conspiracy "a shocking record with no parallel in the jurisprudence of this country." Despite the denunciation from the bench, President William McKinley pardoned McKenzie after he had served only three months in jail. Judge Noyes got off with a \$1,000 fine.

The gang had stolen uncounted millions of miners' money. It was around this scandalous episode in Alaska's history that Rex Beach based *The Spoilers*, the novel which made his reputation.

All through the miners' successive crises they had come to Rickard for advice and leadership. In 1901, a group of them urged Tex to run for mayor, telling him he was the best-liked man in town. Tex declined, saying that the outside world might misunderstand Nome having a professional gambler as mayor. But he did agree to serve on the city council.

By then Tex had not only the most honest but the biggest gambling house in town. It was in a building 60 by 40 feet wide that he had put up in May, 1900. This place, The Northern, had one floor and a second-floor false front, a piano on a platform, crystal chandeliers, and a long mirror behind the bar.

Six bartenders worked there day and night, the favorite drink being the boilermaker—whisky with a beer chaser. The place was jammed at all hours by miners, officials, bankers, gamblers, and girls from the nearby dance halls. The games included roulette, blackjack, twenty-one, bridge, solitaire, and poker.

Rickard's Northern was the only place in Nome where bartenders were fired if the proprietor caught them cheating the customers. The odd thing about this is that the value of the newly mined gold varied in value by weight almost as much as it did in color.

And the customers had gypping tricks of their own. Most of

these worked best at the gambling tables where the dealers had no time to weigh the dust. The man who wanted to play at a table tossed his poke to the dealer there, and the dealer weighed it by hefting it in his hand. He then gave the miner chips for whatever the poke was worth in his opinion.

Their guesses were seldom off by more than a fraction of an ounce. But as in Dawson, the crooked customer sometimes loaded the poke with black sand or mercury. All old-timers agree that it was a rare chiseler who tried this trick in The Northern. Tex had befriended so many men, they say, that anyone who tried to cheat him chanced being lynched.

On the Fourth of July that year, to celebrate the first anniversary of the opening of his Nome gambling tent, Tex threw an open-house turkey dinner at a Nome restaurant. The owner of the restaurant asked him, "How can we tell which men are customers in your place?"

"Hell," roared Tex, "a man doesn't have to be a customer of mine to get this free feed."

Everything kept breaking well for Tex during his four lucky years in Nome. He was able to send home more money to his mother. And Lucretia was getting along all right on her own. She had married again, had moved to Seattle, and was bringing up another family by her second husband, J. L. Adams.

One winter Tex put on four fight cards at the Standard Theatre. No admission was charged, the fighters being paid out of what was collected by passing the hat. One night a fighter did not show up. His opponent, himself a roustabout, was angrier than a bridegroom left waiting at the altar, and he challenged anyone in the house. He said he was particularly anxious to fight Paddy Ryan, a professional pugilist, who had beaten him up one day while he was intoxicated and helpless.

There was a roar from the seats, and Paddy Ryan himself strode up, undressing as he hurried down the aisle. Waiting only to take off his trousers and kick off his boots, Ryan climbed into the ring, dressed in his red flannel underwear.

"No more of your lip," he snarled at the other man. "Let's talk with our fists." Both had to be restrained until the bell sounded. Then they charged one another like maddened bulls. The first

round was dingdong all the way, a ferocious slug fest the like of which is seldom seen outside a mining camp. It ended seconds after the second round began. The two fighters, in an uncontrollable rage, raced out, heads down, at the bell. As they met in the center of the ring, both threw right hands from the floor which landed simultaneously. The result was a double knockout.

There were half a dozen big-shot gamblers in the Yukon, but none bigger than Rickard's idol, Sam Bonnifield, or Goldie Golden. One night at Dawson they had faced one another in the biggest poker hand ever dealt during the gold rush. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars was in the pot, which Bonnifield won with four kings against Goldie's four queens.

Luck rode with Sam Bonnifield until he established a bank at Fairbanks, Alaska. Clint Harley, of Seattle, who later became a representative in the Washington state legislature, says, "From 1905 on, I handled more than three million dollars' worth of gold dust that was shipped by Sam Bonnifield from Fairbanks for the credit of the miners of that district.

"Miners turned over their pokes to Sam Bonnifield, without asking him to weigh them. On being notified there was a shipment en route, I met the boat. I would take the gold to the assay office. On finding out the value of each poke's contents, I'd advise Bonnifield about it. He then paid the miners or, if they preferred, deposited the money in his bank to their account. He also loaned money in this same free-and-easy way. Once he loaned Tex Rickard twenty thousand dollars without security."

In the depression of 1907 Sam Bonnifield, who, like his protégé Tex, never flicked an eyelash when his own money was on the line, suffered a nervous breakdown because of his fear that his miner-depositors were about to lose their lifetime savings.

People in Fairbanks one day saw Bonnifield kneeling in the snow in front of his bank. Coming close to him they heard him praying, "Oh, God! Please show me the way out."

And no one who had trusted Bonnifield lost a penny of his money. Sam, however, went bankrupt covering their losses. Sam was living in a Seattle flophouse in 1943 when he was killed in an automobile accident. The body of the great gambler lay for a week on a stone slab in the city morgue. Then friends claimed it.

IOU's by the dozen were found among his papers in his flophouse cubicle.

"When I read about Sam's death in the *Post-Intelligencer*," says Sam Taggard, an old Alaskan, "I kept thinking about those poker games I had watched him play in up at Dawson and Nome. If only he had not called a twenty-five-thousand-dollar raise—just two or three times, say—on losing hands, he would have had enough to live on in clover for the rest of his life. But not calling when you think you have them is, of course, impossible if you are a gambler."

Fate caught up with Goldie Golden, Sam's great rival, earlier, and while he was running a gambling house in Nome. One day when the weather made it all but suicidal to go out, Goldie got bored and suggested to his partners that he would like to buck the tiger in the house's faro game.

And Goldie did buck the tiger—for seventy-two hours running, without leaving the table. When he quit he had lost \$180,000, which represented everything he had, including his piece of the gambling saloon.

He picked up the faro box and smashed it on the floor then. "What the hell kind of a faro bank is this," he demanded, "when not even an owner of the joint can make expenses bucking it?"

His partners offered to let him buy back his share and pay them off in installments out of his percentage of the resort's earnings. But Goldie was through in Alaska, he said. He did accept \$1,000 to pay his fare home.

"But not as a loan," he said. "This is a gift. Getaway money. Nobody up here is ever going to hear of me again."

Nobody in Alaska ever did.

A crooked faro player named Policy Bob one day lay dying in his Nome cabin. Though Rickard had barred him from The Northern—Policy Bob was also a hophead—Tex heard he was ill and brought Doc Renniger to see what he could do for him.

Doc Renniger took one look at the man writhing and babbling in delirium on the bunk and shook his head. "Policy Bob," he said, "is a goner. He's taken too much dope to live. He'll be dead in another hour or two. There's nothing I can do for him."

"Well, I'll wait here, Doc," said Tex, "if you'll get Montana

to come over here from my place. It ain't right to let even a rat like this one die all alone."

While waiting for Montana, one of the Northern's bouncers, Tex leaned over Policy Bob's skeleton-thin body to hear what he was saying. What he heard was, "Copper the deuce! Copper the deuce!"

As Tex stood up again, the bouncer was coming through the door. "You stay with him, Montana," Tex told him, "and if he asks for whisky or anything, give it to him. Give the little thief anything he wants. Even gold dust, if he wants it."

"What's your hurry, boss?" asked Montana, who was less than delighted to be left alone with a dying man.

"What's my hurry?" demanded Rickard. "Listen to what Policy Bob is saying!" This time they both leaned over the bunk. Policy Bob was still raving, "Copper the deuce! Copper the deuce!"

"Never had a better tip, Montana," gasped Tex. "A tip from a dying man! What more could a guy ask?"

With that, Rickard dashed out and over to Dick Dawson's saloon which billed itself "The Only Second Class Saloon in Alaska." He lost no time in getting into the faro game there, and copped the deuce without interruption. This meant simply that he was reversing the usual faro play and betting that the deuce would be the first card to appear instead of the second, in a "turn" the dealer drew from the box. The play was so named because a copper counter is used to indicate the gambler's intention.

At four o'clock in the morning, with Rickard out \$11,000, Montana came in to whisper mournfully that poor Policy Bob had died without regaining his senses.

"What a sonofabitch *he* was!" Tex shouted. "Policy Bob never turned an honest card in his life, and now he goes and double-crosses me when he's dying!"

Rickard himself was fond of telling newspapermen a story about a poker game in Nome which—whether he realized it or not—showed precisely at what point the ethics of an honest professional gambler stop functioning.

"In this stud game," Tex said, "another feller opened under the gun and I was the only one that stayed. I wasn't fixin' to stay,

but this feller was nervous. He kept pullin' the top card off his hand and shoving it under the bottom. I could just catch a look at the corner of each card as he pulled them off the top, over and over again, sayin' nothin' and waitin' for me to move.

"I stalled quite a while. I wanted to read his hand two or three times to make sure I had it right. Finally I was sure my hand could lick him. So I gave the bet a small hoist and he gave it a big boost. I kicked it a little more and he kicked it again. Then I gave it a hell of a kick, right through the ceiling. He called. I never told him how I licked him."

And Tex would conclude with the advice, "Remember, never fumble with your cards in a professional game. Keep 'em together, if it's draw, and keep the backs covered with your fingers."

Tex could recall only one experience with a sore loser in which the player charged him with running a crooked game. "And that feller apologized for it afterwards," he said. "He was pretty drunk and blew a fortune on my roulette wheel. I kept telling him to quit, but he wouldn't. He kept right on until he was broke, and then he yelled murder. He said the game was crooked and he wanted his money back.

"I told him," continued Tex, "that my games wasn't run on the money-back principle. He pulled a gun on me and said that if I didn't give him his money he would shoot me full of holes. Somehow or other I knew he was bluffing. I grabbed that rod of his and threw it behind the bar. Next day he came back and apologized, and we had a drink together. He walked out that day and I never saw him again."

Bill Mizner liked to tell about the quarrel Tex had with another gambler named Frank McLeod, who had traveled from Nome with Rickard for a restful visit to Hot Springs, Arkansas. At the tables there they both fell to gambling—gamblers only go on busmen's holidays, no matter where they travel—and the excursion ended up with each accusing the other of owing him money.

Tex came back alone that summer, still bristling. He told Mizner that he wished McLeod informed, whenever he put in an appearance, that Nome was not big enough for the two of them. He made this announcement, anticipating that Mizner would see McLeod first. This was because McLeod had been associated with



Wilson Mizner in the operation of the latter's McQuesten Hotel, which seems to have been a curious combination of gambling hell, dance hall, brothel, and flophouse sleeping thirty to forty men to a room.

McLeod did come back the following spring. Mizner, faithful to his trust, gave him Rickard's message. "But McLeod was tough too," Mizner always explained. "He asked me to go to The Northern and give Rickard a message from him. It was, 'I say he can meet me now, in the middle of the street, and tell him to come out of his place with his gun smoking.'"

Again the obliging chap, Mizner got to The Northern in record time. He told Tex what McLeod had said. "He was there," explained Mizner, "weighing gold dust. His hand did not tremble over the scale. He grinned in his funny way, and said, without raising his voice, 'I heard that bum McLeod was back here without a quarter to his name. Now, Bill, I'm worth nearly half a million. Tell him it ain't an equal gamble. I ain't laying no half million bucks against nothin' for anyone. But tell McLeod that the minute he gets himself a load of dough, I'll gun-fight him anywhere.'"

In 1902, not long after Goldie vanished, Tex himself decided to quit America's icebox. Of the half million he had cleared in his four years at Nome, he had only \$15,000 left. But George Murphy paid him \$50,000 for his interest in The Northern.

Tex figured that \$65,000 would be more than enough to buy him the Texas ranch he'd always wanted. He thought he might even get married again—if he could find the right girl.

After his seven years in the North, Tex returned to a country bubbling over with the spirit of the just-born twentieth century. Queen Victoria, that supreme symbol of rectitude and of the harnessed human spirit, was dead. So was stuffy old William McKinley, and Teddy Roosevelt, the gentleman Rough Rider, was in the White House, full of beans and furious energy, and throwing out new ideas by the carload. Some of the ideas were brilliant, some foolish, but they were all ideas of a youthful leader who believed in his own destiny and his country's immeasurable future.

With his vitality and his enormous zest, Roosevelt was possibly the ideal American for his time. He had the morals of a scout-

master and a health of spirit unmatched in Washington for generations. Yet now, that first of the two amazing White House Roosevelts seems the perfect expression of his time rather than the creator of its spirit. With or without him, the nation would have been crackling with energy, ambition, and great dreams.

No less than Teddy Roosevelt, who later became his friend, Tex Rickard was the child of that era. Like so many other men of 1902, he thought big and there was no limit to his ambition.

But his next adventure was the sort that causes others to lose faith in their own judgment. From Nome Tex went to Seattle to visit for a while with his mother before continuing on to Texas. He had not been there for a week before he heard of a young burglar in Walla Walla Prison who claimed to know the location of a secret diamond mine in South Africa.

It was a hard one to believe but Tex, after interviewing the convict, fell for this switch on the old Spanish Prisoner confidence gimmick. And he convinced the state of Washington penal authorities that they should parole the prisoner, who called himself Hal Keppersmith, in his custody for six months.

He told the officials he intended to take the convict to the other side of the world. The fact that Clay County, Texas, the year before had made Tex an honorary sheriff and given him a gold badge helped, together with broad hints that he wouldn't be selfish on his return about keeping all the diamonds he found.

There was, of course, no diamond mine, something Keppersmith admitted to Tex two weeks after they reached South Africa. "You sure made a chump out of me," Tex told him. "But I can understand a man locked up for years like you've been wanting a vacation and a nice long boat ride. But now the party's over. Come on, let's go." With no resistance from his apologetic prisoner, Tex took him to the Johannesburg jail, where he was housed until Tex was ready to leave for home.

The most interesting thing about this absurd fool's errand half across the world is that even here the fabulous Rickard luck stayed with him. Because it was in South Africa that Tex met Walter Fields, whose friendship and companionship for the rest of his life gave Tex more pleasure than could owning half the jewels in Christendom.

Tex met Walter and his redoubtable brother, W. C. Fields, on a road near Cape Town. The brothers had just come rolling down from a mountain in a wagon which some local Edison had converted into a horseless buggy.

But when Rickard first saw it, the gas buggy was stalled, and the irascible Bill Fields's temper was at the exploding point.

"Are you fellows Americans?" asked Tex.

"What makes you think so?" demanded Bill Fields.

Rickard laughed. "Only Americans would ride in such a crazy-looking thing. What makes it go?"

"The gasoline engine in the back."

Tex walked all around the vehicle, and asked, "What engine? I don't see no engine." Both Fieldses jumped out of the car and ran around to the back.

"It fell off, I guess," said Bill Fields. He turned to his brother. "Okay, walk back and get it."

Walter looked up at the mountain. "Walk back way up there?"

"You heard me. When you find it, put it back on. You'll find me in the nearest saloon with this gentleman here."

The Fields brothers were in Africa on an around-the-world tour. Tex saw their act that night. He laughed until the tears came, but not at W. C. Fields, who confined himself to juggling in those days and left the comedy bits to Walter. Walter was good at dropping the Indian clubs, falling into the orchestra pit, and wrecking the scenery. Even when W. C. Fields became Broadway's leading comic star Rickard always insisted that Walter was funnier.

After that meeting in Africa Walter Fields and Tex were inseparable whenever possible, though Walter did not start working for the promoter until 1918. A tall handsome extrovert, now in his late seventies, Walter Fields was one man who always could make Rickard laugh with a word or a gesture.

"People who say Tex had no sense of humor never knew him as I did," he says, but adds, "I may be prejudiced, though, because he was the best audience I ever had."

On taking his prisoner home, Tex allowed him the free run of the boat. No one on board knew he was a convict. But as the ship neared New York, Tex noticed that Hal Keppersmith appeared to be getting restless. He explained the situation to the ship's captain

and that official arranged to have two New York detectives waiting for Keppersmith at the gangplank. As they started leading him away, the convict asked, "Why didn't you tell me I would be thrown into the can when we got there?"

"I didn't want to spoil your boat trip," said Rickard.

But when Tex started west, Keppersmith was on the train with him. On the long trip back to Walla Walla the forger made no attempt to bolt.

Tex declared, "I guess I misjudged that fellow's nervousness on the boat. I shouldn't have because I never have any trouble handling men of his type.

"That feller wasn't no real criminal anyway. He just got hungry one night, broke into a grocery store, and was caught there. He was just an ignorant young guy. My experience has always been that if you convince an ignorant man like him you're dealing square with him, he'll play square with you every time."

Asked if he didn't resent the "ignorant young guy's" taking him for a joy ride half around the world, Tex shook his head and said, "What the hell? It was a wonderful trip and well worth what it cost."

Tex's attitude—that any money spent was well spent, certainly not worth worrying about when it was gone—was part of his great charm.

On returning his prisoner to Walla Walla Tex went on a trip to San Francisco. Like some big, overgrown kid, he hung around the fashionable hotels hoping to catch a glimpse of Gentleman Jim Corbett.

"Though Fitzsimmons had beaten Gentleman Jim, and taken his title," Tex always said, "Corbett still was my idol. Of course, at that time I hadn't seen Jim Jeffries fight."

Tex did not see Corbett, but one day on the street he ran into Mrs. Flora Myers, a former actress whose pretty eighteen-year-old daughter, Edith Mae, had played the piano in his Nome saloon for a couple of weeks that summer. Mrs. Myers had chaperoned the girl on the trip.

In Nome Tex had been quite smitten with the girl, who was a gifted musician, but had felt that she was both too young and too refined to be interested in a rough sporting man like him.

That evening, when he called at the Myer flat, he was surprised by the warmth of Edith Mae's welcome. Within a week he had proposed to her, and a week later they were married in Sacramento. They never had a child of their own, but later adopted a blond infant girl.

Now Tex appeared all set to retire to the Texas ranch he had so often talked about. Edith Mae was enthusiastic about the idea though she told Tex that anywhere he wished to go would be all right with her.

But they went nowhere. They stayed in Seattle when a friend told Tex about a perfect spot for a gambling saloon. This was at First Avenue and Washington Street, in the heart of the town's red-light district. Tex postponed his plan to become a rancher. He took over the lease, summoned painters, told them he wanted the place decorated like an Alaskan gambling saloon, and called his new spot The Totem.

Nate Druksman, now a middle-aged Seattle realtor who also promotes fights, remembers seeing Tex every morning walking along Skid Road to his new location.

"He was never too busy to stop and hand out dimes to us kids," says Druksman. "If it was a sunny day he'd have us dive off the docks for the coins. Sometimes, when he'd run out of dimes, he'd throw in quarters and half dollars. But if it was a chilly, rainy day, he'd tell us not to dive because we might catch cold, and hand out a dime to each of us anyway."

Tex's pal had advised him to contribute \$1,000 to a local political campaign fund. "Best investment you could make," he said. Tex sent in the money.

Just before he was ready to open, what mobsters refer to as a "prominent underworld figure" came to call on Tex. He congratulated Rickard on the excellence of his taste in gambling equipment.

"This is such a nice-looking joint I'm only gonna ask twenty per cent of your gambling take."

Rickard stared at him. "Off the top?" he asked.

"Off the top."

"Get the hell out of here," said Rickard, "and don't come back."

The prominent underworld figure looked at him pityingly,

shrugged, and never came back. What did come back that very evening was Rickard's \$1,000 campaign contribution. This was delivered to him in an envelope and he was asked for a receipt. Tex thought he knew what that meant, but decided to open his place anyway. With so much of his bankroll sunk into The Totem he couldn't see that he had much more to lose no matter what happened.

The evening before his grand opening two uniformed policemen appeared at the door. They were very polite. They told Tex that their superiors had become concerned about his personal safety, seeing he was a stranger in town.

"Sometimes the going gets pretty rough down here along Skid Road," one of them said. "One of us will stay at the door, the other will keep an eye on everything going on inside your place."

Though Tex's friend had warned him that something like this might follow his refusal to cut in his visitor for 20 per cent, Tex argued with the cops. He told them that he would put up any bond required by the authorities. "I've never owned a place that wasn't run orderly," he said, "and I'll have plenty of bouncers to help me run this joint."

The policemen were patient. "It's because our boss knows that you want to run a nice place that he sent us here to help you do just that. The idea is to protect *you* against the Skid Road bums and roughnecks."

Rickard stopped talking. He knew he was licked. The next day he sold The Totem for a song to a stranger who said he had just got a mysterious hunch that Tex might want to get rid of the place.

With his wife and the baby, Bessie, Tex took the next boat to Nome. On this trip he met E. S. (Kid) Highley, who had made a fortune running a gambling house in Skagway. The Kid was looking for another similar proposition in Nome. Rickard suggested he try to buy into The Northern.

"Didn't know whether or not George Murphy would care to sell part of the joint," Tex said, "but having my new friend's cash ready for action, I knew, wouldn't hurt me none." Actually, Murphy took in both men as partners. He gave Rickard a piece of the place to resume his job as the saloon's front man.

The weather didn't agree with Ellie Mae, and late in 1904 the

Rickards left Nome for good. Tex sold out his piece in The Northern to Frank Hall, who was short of money but promised to pay him off on the installment plan.

Hall mailed the last payment to Tex in 1906, a few days before a storm leveled The Northern and wrecked practically everything else in the town. Tex got the news in another Northern, his gambling saloon in Goldfield, Nevada. Tossing the paper to the bartender, he said:

"Now the *weather's* on my side. Ever hear of a big storm holding off until an old gambler could cash the last payment check for a gambling joint?"

# 7

## Tex Rickard's biggest lucky break

DURING THE LAST HALF of his life an angelic smile would settle on Joe Humphreys' knoblike features when anyone mentioned Terrible Terry McGovern, his turn-of-the-century featherweight champion. Though greatly honored and adequately paid as the world's supreme sports announcer, Mr. Humphreys always said that the most glorious years of his life had been those he'd spent as the Terrible One's co-manager.

Joe was a thoroughly honest man, especially when money was not involved. He also admitted that there had been short periods when his ring idol's utter lack of consideration made him wish he were dead. His favorite example was the summer of 1906 when he was continuously broke. By then, Terrible Terry McGovern had long been an ex-champion. Though he had not yet retired, Terry was fast losing his ring savagery because of his overactive social life. But Terry was still intent on retaining his second title of champion drink buyer in the unlovely pubs of his native South Brooklyn.

Humphreys always considered it a sardonic circumstance that, because of his own spartanlike courage in adversity, Terry could



never comprehend that he was broke. "Terry was the only man in New York I *wasn't* trying to fool with my cane, my jaunty George M. Cohan walk," Joe recalled. "It was everybody else that I wanted to think I was in the chips, the guy who owned Broadway."

Meanwhile, his bogus jauntness was rapidly undermined by Terry's habit of waiting for him in the lobby of his hotel to ask for a loan. This distressed Joe even more when Terry brought along his mother, Mrs. Kenny.

Mrs. Kenny was 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighed 300 pounds, and was, as they say in South Brooklyn, all mouth. She had had thirteen children by her three husbands, and wore her three wedding rings on the same fat finger. Her tenement neighbors considered this ostentatious. When Mrs. Kenny was well beyond earshot they marveled to one another that she had been able to shut up long enough for the priest to marry her once, no less three times.

That summer, toward the end of July, Humphreys owed nine weeks' room rent, the hotel manager was calling him daily, and Joe had stopped asking for mail. It was only a question of time before the hotel would turn the key on him. Of one thing Joe was sure: a single additional appearance in the lobby of his great ex-champion and Mrs. Kenny would render him homeless.

The cops assigned to Butler Street Station House in Brooklyn would have been both startled and pleased to learn that Mrs. Kenny had taken to wandering that far from their jurisdiction.

Long before Terrible Terry laced on his first pair of boxing gloves his mother had established her reputation as the greatest barroom brawler of either sex ever seen in Brooklyn, the so-called City of Churches.

"Terry got his style of delivering blows straight from the shoulder from his old mother," Mrs. Kenny, then fifty-six, boasted in a newspaper interview July 29, 1900. "Champ or no champ, I can lick him right now with me left hand."

Terry became a neighborhood idol at eleven when he threw a truant officer into the Gowanus Canal, a stream whose odors visiting Chinese diplomats said reminded them of Hong Kong. The official, obviously a man with a suicide complex, climbed to Mrs. Kenny's flat to complain to her. She threw him downstairs.

"And I would have threw him out me back winder," she told her interviewer, "if it hadn't been a Monday with all me clean wash out on the line."

When Mrs. Kenny was on the drink the captain of the Butler Street Station paid homage to her slugging, biting, and kicking ability by dispatching his four bravest and strongest cops to remove her from whatever tavern she was taking apart.

To the captain's regret, department regulations forbade his men proceeding in disguise. Nothing in the world incensed Mrs. Kenny more than the sight of men in blue, with their shining brass buttons and silver badges.

The four Butler Street officers always attempted to lure Mrs. Kenny from the free-lunch counter—whenever so much as a bowl of pretzels remained there unbroken.

But Terrible Terry's mother always responded to the policemen's friendly greetings and offers to buy her drinks—if she'd only step outside—by hurling pans of hot clam broth and boiling sauerkraut, pigs' feet, bowls of hard-boiled eggs, tomatoes, and soused mackerel, together with bottles of ketchup, mustard, horseradish, and other condiments.

The captain of the Butler Street Station House had long been asking for a statute forbidding the serving of free lunch in all saloons Mrs. Kenny graced with her presence. Summoned to Brooklyn Headquarters once to explain, the captain said, "I don't think it helps my men's morale any to keep dragging that woman in and out of the patrol wagon looking as though they'd just wrecked a delicatessen."

As Terry's co-manager, Mr. Humphreys was anything but unaware of Mrs. Kenny's spirited outbursts. During that last week in July, when his situation at the hotel had become truly nerve-racking, Joe had nightmares each evening in which he saw Terrible Terry's terrible mother jamming the hotel manager's head into a lobby cuspidor.

But on Thursday of that week Joe's fortunes took a slight turn for the better. At Jack Doyle's Broadway Billiard Academy, on the corner of Fortieth Street, he saw a rival fight manager named Tom O'Rourke collect eighty-five dollars after a six-hour snooker pool game. By combining muscle, threats of blackmail, and hypnotism, Mr. Humphreys managed to borrow five dollars from the

reluctant O'Rourke. Joe then hurried to his hotel to change his shirt and tie. To make certain that neither the hotel nor Terry and his mother could shake this currency out of him, Mr. Humphreys hid the bill in the bottom of his right sock.

He planned to revive his sagging ego by squandering the five dollars at Churchill's Restaurant on a first-class dinner, preceded by a Martini and accompanied by a bottle of wine.

Whistling gaily, he entered the hotel and strode past the desk. At least he started to, but was frozen in his tracks by the long-feared words.

*"Mister Humphreys!"*

Even when introducing the greatest fighters of all time to vast crowds, Joe had the despairing, long-suffering air of a man who considers himself misunderstood by women, headwaiters, dogs, and doctors. But he never looked sadder, it was his own opinion, than when he turned that night to the desk. His sorrow swiftly turned to joy as he observed that the frozen-faced desk clerk was holding a Western Union telegram.

"I'm afraid you'll have to pay the charges—\$4.90," said the clerk. "That is, if you wish to read it, Mr. Humphreys."

Later Joe said his first idea was that some wealthy relative had left him a fortune and that a frugal lawyer had sent the wire collect. This idea so inflamed him that he knelt down and removed his shoe, then his sock. Extracting the sweaty five-dollar bill, he handed it to the room clerk.

"This just goes to show how being broke can make a man lose his buttons," Joe always would comment. "Right then, with only five bucks in my sock, I was in better financial shape than anyone else in my family."

Standing with one foot bare in the lobby, he ripped open the yellow envelope. The wire was from a man he never heard of in a town he never heard of. It read:

CAN MAKE YOU AN OFFER OF FIFTEEN  
THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR A FIGHT TO A FINISH  
BETWEEN TERRY MCGOVERN AND JIMMY  
BRITT TO TAKE PLACE AT GOLDFIELD,  
NEVADA. WIRE ANSWER IMMEDIATELY.

TEX RICKARD.

Joe had to read the wire twice before he could believe it. Until then, \$15,000 had never been guaranteed two lightweight fighters for any fight anywhere.

"*This is collect?*" asked Mr. Humphreys.

"So the telegram states," said the desk clerk, as he hastily deposited with two fingers the revolting five-dollar bill in his cash drawer. While handing the dime change to the stunned man, the clerk added, "I am sure, Mr. Humphreys, that the great Western Union Telegraph Company would not dare attempt to cheat a man of your social and financial standing."

Terry McGovern's co-manager slowly put on his sock and shoe. Then he tottered off to the nearest telegraph office and dispatched a collect wire to Rickard which said "No!" in six dollars' worth of abusive language. That evening he dined on a wholesome ounce of ten-cent whisky and free lunch, even though this reminded him that Mrs. Kenny and her son might be waiting for him at his hotel.

Not wishing to encourage McGovern's fantasies about money, Joe did not mention the absurd offer.

It was just as well.

A few days afterward, Terry came charging at him brandishing a newspaper. "That Joe Gans is half dead," he howled, "but *his* manager gets him a thirty-thousand-dollar fight." Humphreys took the newspaper the Terrible One was rattling under his nose, and read the story. It said that Joe Gans, the Negro, and Battling Nelson, the Durable Dane, had been matched to fight for the world lightweight championship by a man in Goldfield, Nevada, named Tex Rickard.

What made the match front-page news was the unprecedented purse, double any guaranteed before in ring history. Humphreys never fainted, but he said the closest he came to it was that day.

He did blanch and stagger, partly because Terry was shadow-boxing all around him, muttering, "You know what I'd do for that kind of money? I'd tear a wild tiger apart, that's what."

Mr. Humphreys' attack of dizziness was repeated a few days later while he was discussing the episode with Bat Masterson, the gun-fighting sheriff of Dodge City in its rowdiest days. In his old age Bat had become a writer on that sporty New York newspaper, *The Morning Telegraph*.

"But you met Tex Rickard, Joe," Bat exclaimed, "only a few weeks ago. He was in town to see how Canfield runs his classy gambling house. Wanted ideas about fancying up his own gambling saloon out there in Goldfield. I brought him to the McGovern-Britt fight at the Garden and introduced you to him then."

"Has he got thirty thousand dollars to blow on a prize fight?" asked Humphreys.

"If Tex Rickard offered it, he's got it. If he offered you a hundred thousand dollars on his word, you could take that also. That's the kind of man he is."

"How come I don't remember him, or even his name, Bat?"

Masterson cackled as he had done in the old days at Dodge City when about to shoot down some ornery critter. "I dunno, Joe," he said quietly. "My friend Tex was so excited at that fight that he pounded you on the back. It wasn't no good, the fight, but he didn't know that. All he ever saw before was those barroom brawls back in his Klondike gold-rush days."

"Oh, yeah?" said Humphreys, his eyes narrowing.

"And you just gave him a look and said, 'Cool off, cowboy. Sit down, cowboy, and cool off.' Remember, Joe?"

Humphreys nodded, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

It was three years before he again met Tex. Rickard was then in New York intent on signing up Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries for their heavyweight title fight. Joe couldn't resist asking Rickard why he happened to send the \$15,000 offer collect.

"Hell, I didn't send it collect," Tex told him. "I wrote out that telegram and gave my porter a ten-dollar gold piece to send it. I guess the young feller just put the whole ten dollars in his pocket, forgetful-like."

On seeing Joe's crestfallen face, Tex couldn't help laughing. Mr. Humphreys' refusal of his \$15,000 offer had given him the biggest break of his life, even though it had taken him a while to realize it.

Tex and Kid Highley had headed for southwestern Nevada late in 1904 on hearing about the fabulous new gold strikes there. Prospectors and mining experts were already hoping these would equal the \$370,000,000 the Comstock Lode district had yielded.

That strike, which created the state of Nevada, had been made a long while before, in 1859.

During the last years of the nineteenth century mining had become little more than a memory in Nevada, California, and elsewhere in the West. Virginia City, which the Comstock had made world-famous, was a ghost town, and so were the other towns where men had swung their picks, rocked their pans, and blown in their gold dust at the nearest gambling saloon.

But in May, 1900, there had been fresh discoveries of gold and silver in the southwestern part of the state, starting a new boom and creating the town of Tonopah. In two years \$7,000,000 was taken from the town's mines, and several thousand persons were living there.

To mining men and prospectors the most exciting thing about this new boom was the discovery that Tonopah was merely part of an extensive mining belt. Two years after the Tonopah strike gold and silver were also found in quantity around Goldfield, in Esmeralda County, twenty-four miles from Tonopah.

The year Rickard and Highley got there the mines around Goldfield yielded \$2,300,000 in gold. This was 30 per cent of Nevada's entire 1904 gold production, and brought Charles M. Schwab and other representatives of the country's biggest banking interests to the scene on the run.

Aside from differences in temperature and accessibility, Goldfield had much in common with Nome. There were no trees in sight, building materials had to be hauled across hundreds of miles of trackless desert, there was an acute water shortage, and the price of everything was sky-high. The streets were not deep in mud here, but covered with dust 15 inches deep.

There were a few added features: gangs of armed high-graders who worked underground and looted indiscriminately whichever mines they happened to burrow into. Millions were stolen by these high-graders. Goldfield also had its sensation-peddling press agents, a stock exchange of its own where shares rose to astronomical heights overnight, and often dropped as swiftly.

Within twenty-four hours the Mohawk mine made a millionaire of George Wingfield, a gambler who later became a United States Senator and ended up owning most of Nevada.

Rickard and Highley and a third partner, Jim Morrison, opened The Northern in Goldfield on February 15, 1905. It has often been called the most successful and exciting gambling saloon the West ever saw. The resort had no less than fourteen gambling tables—three for craps, three for roulette, three for faro, and five for blackjack. It never closed and had two or more floor bosses on duty at all times. Among them were Rickard, Kid Highley, and Wyatt Earp.

From the night it opened The Northern did a land-office business. It sold six barrels of whisky each day, in addition to large quantities of wine, gin, and beer. Behind its 60-foot bar three shifts of bartenders worked, six to twelve men to a shift.

But the most extraordinary feature of The Northern was its bookkeeping system. When the late and brilliant C. B. Glasscock was gathering material for *Gold in Them Hills*, his book on the Nevada gold rushes of that decade, he got a remarkable account of this system from Billy Murray, who presided over the cashier's cage at the Goldfield Northern during its two most profitable years.

"I didn't know anything about bookkeeping," Billy told Glasscock. "I didn't know anything about cashiering. But Tex told me to go in there and take care of the cash, and I did. I had a little grocery order blank book and an indelible pencil. When they made up the cash from the games and the bar and brought it to the safe, I counted it and made a note in the book. If one of the games needed more money I gave it to the dealer and deducted it from the record. As long as I could add and subtract I was all right."

Billy Murray said that in two years he handled about ten thousand dollars a day, or more than seven million dollars. He added that it wasn't all net earnings. Tex and Kid Highley had re-established in Goldfield their function as bankers for the miners. Murray also told Glasscock the fascinating story of how this had saved the John S. McCook Bank in Goldfield from going bankrupt during a one-day run.

Most of the miners who had hurriedly withdrawn their savings from the bank lugged it straight to The Northern, down the street. Because of Rickard's reputation for integrity they felt sure it would be safer in his saloon than anywhere else. But this rush

of currency hampered Billy Murray greatly in the cage because it was all in silver and gold coins.

Billy said that the money kept coming in to him so fast that soon there was no more room for it in his safe. He just put the silver dollars in sacks and dropped them on the floor, he said. But finally there were so many of the sacks in his cage that he couldn't move. Then he called one of the bosses, who carried as many sacks as he could manage at a time through the back door, down an alley, and right back into the McCook Bank.

Murray believed that on that hectic day some of the money came in and out of his cage as much as ten times. Each time, the excess bags of money were sneaked back to the bank, which closed with as much cash on hand as it had had that morning. When Ole Elliott bought out Jim Morrison's share in the place he told Highley and Rickard he wholeheartedly approved their book-keeping system.

Before coming to Goldfield, Ole Elliott, a big, easygoing Swede, had been a high-rolling gambling-house man over at Tonopah. One evening a Swiss banker who was in Nevada to shop around for some bargains in mining properties got \$16,000 behind in Ole's dice game. The Swiss had started with a quarter bet, then kept doubling it as he lost.

"What's the limit here?" he asked Ole, who was running the game.

"You name it," said Ole. "Bet whatever you want."

"I'll bet the sixteen thousand dollars I'm out," said the Swiss, picking up the dice. His effort to get even by doubling up succeeded. He threw a seven on his first roll.

Ole yawned and muttered something about its having been quite a day for him. "I guess I need a couple of hours sleep," he said, and ordered a round of champagne on the house.

When Ole moved on to Goldfield he had almost no money. He opened his first saloon there, the Combination, in the local blacksmith's shop. Though he was unable to afford a bartender, he scraped up enough cash to place an advertisement in the first issue of the *Goldfield News*, which appeared on April 29, 1904. It read:



## THE COMBINATION CELLAR

W. S. (OLE) ELLIOTT, PROP.

Straight goods and case goods a specialty.

The most complete stock in Goldfield  
of the best brands of liquors.

*"Draw your drink straight from the barrel."*

Ole was a simple, sincere man. He wanted everybody in Goldfield to take the ad's last sentence literally. When he wished to go anywhere, he just left everything as it was and put a cigar box on his bar so his customers could take whatever drinks they wanted and make change in his cigar box. Thus put on their honor, even those customers of Ole Elliott's who were crooks, felt duty bound not to shortchange him.

Kid Highley also was an unusual type of man to find running a gambling house. The Kid was an excellent family man who neither drank, smoked, or chased women. Highley looked upon gambling merely as a business. Wherever he was, he went to church each Sunday with his wife and four children.

His only relaxation was shooting, a sport he pursued until he was almost sixty. Then one day in 1928 he shot off his right arm in a duck-hunting accident. As this is written, the Kid, eighty-five years old and still wealthy, occupies the most expensive suite of rooms in the Clift Hotel in San Francisco.

When not traveling around the West to see old friends, Mr. Highley has his chauffeur drive him out to the Olympic Club where he spends the day playing cards and talking about shooting experiences with the other veteran marksmen there.

He is another early associate of Tex's who remembers the famous promoter who "never had two sentences to rub together" as a great barroom talker. "It was his gift of gab, all right," said old Kid Highley. "That's what attracted the customers. You'd always see a crowd around that man, listening to him.

"As a floor boss, I couldn't say he was much of a worker. But nobody minded because he could always draw in that crowd. His very name and reputation attracted the customers. And he was a

real gambler, always angling for a deal," went on Mr. Highley. "He was free with his money and apt to be fleeced. Once he lost all of his money in a mine that was 'salted.' By that I mean one in which the gold has been sprayed into the rock so it would assay high at any government office."

That usually makes old Kid Highley shake his head. It has always puzzled him that a man who had spent as much time around gold mines and mining men could be taken in by that familiar swindling trick.

But when reminded that it was Rickard who promoted the Gans-Nelson fight, the Kid's eyes light up, and he says:

"There has never been anything like it."

## 8

### The first "Battle of the Century"

BEING A GAMBLER, nothing pleased Tex so much as being told that he was the luckiest man alive. It was with great glee that he admitted that McGovern and Britt fighting in the desert would have been a flop.

"And I might never have got backing for another fight," he would chortle. "I guess I can thank Joe Humphreys' bum memory for everything. And I needed all the other breaks I got on that fight, because I didn't know nothing then about the business."

Among these "good breaks" were developments that would have compelled any experienced promoter to abandon the project, change his name, buy sunglasses, grow a beard, and swear he had never heard of Goldfield, Nevada. Yet each of these breaks helped make the fight a success and a national sensation.

Rickard's second choice for the fight in the desert—Battling Nelson, the Durable Dane, versus Joe Gans, the Old Master, for the lightweight championship of the world—was a natural.

With heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries in retirement, Battling Nelson was the most popular fighter in the country. He had been claiming Gans's title for a year.

Gans, a Baltimore Negro, had long been rated as invincible

against anyone, including heavyweights. Joe was that rarest of all fighters, a superb boxer who also packed a knockout punch in either hand. It is difficult to think of anyone but Benny Leonard, the lightweight champion of twenty years later, who could box as brilliantly and also hit as hard.

But many sports fans had long doubted Gans's gameness when the going got too rough. Only a few months before Rickard signed him to fight Nelson, the Old Master had confessed engaging in two fake bouts.

What appears almost fantastic today is the manner in which the doubts of Gans's gameness and his honesty, and other discouraging factors, tremendously helped the preflight build-up.

From the beginning, no one pretended that the bout was anything but a promotion stunt for Goldfield's mining stocks. The saloon men were also eager to back the fight, reasoning that some of the boxing fans might find time to drink up and gamble away some of their cash when not buying into local holes in the ground.

Goldfield was trying to live up to its slogan, "The greatest mining camp ever known." During 1904, W. R. Lawson, a special writer for the *London Financial News*, had predicted the area might produce so much gold that the world price would collapse and make it necessary to establish some other standard of monetary value.

Though two years later the gold standard appeared secure, certain properties close to Goldfield were still producing on a scale which can only be described as fabulous. Five million dollars' worth of gold-bearing ore had been taken out of the Mohawk in 106 days. A few other mines were yielding as much as \$1,000 per ton.

Mixed in with the honest Goldfielders were the inevitable thieves and other characters deeply interested in the quick buck. They were cleaning up by peddling worthless mining stocks as rapidly as they found fresh suckers. Bob Edgren, the sports editor, once described Goldfield as a town entirely surrounded by men with from one to one thousand mining claims each to sell you. Before Nevada's second great gold rush ended, the American public sank \$150,000,000 into worthless mining properties in that state. With

its own stock exchange and four prosperous banks, the men of Goldfield spearheaded the looting. One close student of the state, Richard G. Lilliard, said it all when he wrote:

"Promoters with rascally motives flourished in Goldfield as they never had in Virginia City, ingenious though its citizens were in fraud and chicanery. Suave crooks were so thick in Goldfield that they needed badges for identification so that they wouldn't try to sell wildcat to each other."

The Gans-Nelson fight was only one of several devices suggested to stimulate local trade. One thirsty old desert rat wanted a lake-sized hole dug in Main Street and filled with fresh beer every morning and evening. A mineowner argued that a balloon carrying a basket filled with ten-dollar gold pieces would initiate the wildest, biggest treasure hunt in history. Another sun-tanned old gentleman was sure outsiders would be unable to resist a race track for camels imported from the Sahara Desert.

Tex always said that the idea of a fight occurred to him because he remembered all the talk about the Sullivan-Corbett fight he and Willie Slack had heard in San Francisco while they were waiting there to take the boat to Alaska. This was three years after the fight.

"But the way them boys talked, you woulda thought it had been put on the night before," said Tex. "Thinking about that in Goldfield, I figgered folks would get just as het up about some other fight—if we could find the right one to give 'em."

Jack Dempsey says that Tex always liked to tell about what happened after his fellow boosters decided to back the fight.

"After they agreed on having a Goldfield Athletic Club," Tex said, "the loudest talker there jumps up and says he wants to be president. So when nobody hits him over the head with a club he says he will also be master of ceremonies at the fight. Then, one by one, the others jump up and say they will take this or that fancy job for themselves.

"Well, after a while, when they have all these fancy-sounding jobs divvied up, somebody happens to notice I am still around. And he yells, 'Hey! Here is Texie, and we ain't fixed him up yet with a job.'

"So I says, 'I don't want no job. I will be just a chipper-in.' But

they all say, 'That won't do. Everybody that throws in money gets some sort of job. What will we give Texie, boys?'

"Now, remember, all the tony jobs has been passed out. But then the feller who wanted to be treasurer suddenly remembers that somebody might have to do a lot of work, like negotiating with the managers and seeing about an arena and all the rest of it. In other words, running everything from start to finish.

"So the feller who wanted to be treasurer says I can have that job. And then someone else says, 'Let's make Texie the promoter, too.' I still wasn't hot about taking all that on myself. But Kid Highley, my partner, says, 'You got the time for it, Tex. The rest of us haven't.' Where he got that idea from I never will know.

"Now the joke of it is that before I send out the wire to Joe Humphreys I ask the fellers with the tony jobs to sign it. But they all say the same thing: 'No, Tex, you do it.' I guess they didn't want no part of the work. They wanted to save their strength for the slavery needed to get their names and pictures in the papers.

"Well, the joke was on them. I signed them other wires later on, too. Naturally, when the fighters' people and the newspapermen all come swarming in they don't know anyone else to look for but 'that crazy Rickard.' When the other boys with the swell jobs in the Goldfield Athletic Club hear of that they started rushing down to meet the trains. But the reporter fellers just didn't seem to care much about meeting the master of ceremonies or the president or the chairman; they were all looking for me.

"They didn't pay no attention at all to the other boys; they just kept trailing me around, taking my picture and writing pieces about me. And through all the build-up and the fight itself, the other boys' names hardly got mentioned at all."

The first published list of the Goldfield Athletic Club read: L. M. Sullivan, president; John Motcot, vice president; George W. Welles, secretary; G. L. Rickard, treasurer; and Tex's partner, W. E. (Ole) Elliott, was on the board of directors. But after a few days, Tex Rickard became president and promoter, and Ole Elliott, treasurer. Mr. L. M. Sullivan, the man whom Tex had described as the loudest talker in the group, had decided, as will be seen, to take on an even more interesting function in connection with the fight.

Rickard's first offer was a \$20,000 purse for a finish fight between Gans and Nelson on Labor Day, but Billy Nolan, Nelson's manager, did not even acknowledge it. Nolan and Nelson were in Ogden, Utah, where the Battler was playing a vaudeville date.

Tex could not find out who Joe Gans's manager was. But learning that the champion himself was in San Francisco, he wired W. W. Naughton, sports editor of *The Examiner*, the Hearst newspaper there, to locate Joe and inform him of the offer.

In his wire of acceptance, Gans promised to agree to any terms Nelson demanded. He was so broke that he had to borrow train fare to get to Goldfield with his white trainer, Frank MacDonald.

Without waiting to hear from Nelson, Tex went to Reno and made a deal for the lumber he required for his fight arena. While there he was startled to read that his new guarantee was the largest ever offered for a bout, and also that Morris Levy, one of the four members of Sunny Jim Coffroth's famous San Francisco Fight Trust, had left for Utah almost a week before to sign up Nelson.

Imagining this to be the reason he had not heard from Billy Nolan, Tex increased his bid to \$30,000. By the time Tex got back to Goldfield, Nolan's wire of acceptance of his second offer had been received.

On reading it, Rickard went to the John S. McCook Bank and arranged to have the \$30,000 purse displayed there in tall, neat stacks of freshly minted twenty-dollar gold pieces. Tex was surprised by the sensation this made.

William Randolph Hearst neglected to send sports writers to Goldfield even though his San Francisco man, Naughton, had scored a beat on the original offer from Rickard. Fremont Older of the *Bulletin*, however, rushed W. O. (Bill) McGeehan and Rube Goldberg there. Older had no interest in sports but knew instinctively a great story whenever he saw one.

Goldberg and McGeehan were in their early twenties. They found Tex friendly and courteous, eager to tell them everything they wanted to know. His lifelong love affair with the gentlemen of the press had begun.

The first big story was the arrival on the scene of Joe Gans. The champion and his trainer were met at the newly built Goldfield railroad station by Mr. Sullivan, who at the moment was still

president of the local club. Sullivan drove them to The Northern through a crowd of 1,500 cheering miners.

Though head of the Sullivan Trust Company, whose bustling office was next door to The Northern, L. M. Sullivan was an almost illiterate lout, but apt at conniving and scheming. On the short ride to Rickard's gambling saloon he managed to learn that Gans, in addition to lacking a manager, had no idea where he'd get the \$5,000 weight-and-appearance forfeit Billy Nolan was expected to demand that he post.

Sullivan suggested that he might condescend to take charge of the champion's affairs and also put up the \$5,000 for him. "And I'll pay all of your training expenses," he said, adding quietly, "but that's only, you understand, if the right deal can be made."

Gans felt trapped. He was a copper-colored man who had felt meek and behaved humbly before white men all his life. But the white man he most trusted had talked him into faking the fights that had ruined his reputation and destroyed his earning ability.

Joe had sworn never to engage in another framed fight, and he meant it. But now he could only wait to see what this big, prosperous white man had to say, before declaring himself.

Desperate though Gans was for money, he probably would have jumped out of the car and run for his life if he had known of the past of the man who wished to be his new manager.

Before coming to Goldfield Sullivan had run a sailors' rooming house in Seattle that was for transients in the truest sense of the word. So many of his overnight guests woke up aboard rotting old tubs headed for the Orient that Mr. Sullivan had become notorious up and down the Pacific Coast as "Shanghai Larry."

The Northern was jammed when the three men got there. Everyone wanted to shake hands with the lightweight champion. Pushing his way through the mob, Sullivan told Ole Elliott that the Negro ring wizard had just pleaded with him to become his manager. Ole replied that Sullivan must decide whether he wished to be Gans's manager or president of the club.

"Rickard ought to be president, anyway," he said. "He's the one who is doing all the work. As head man, Larry, you ought to be up in Reno with him right now, picking out that lumber."



After a few minutes of painful indecision, Shanghai Larry agreed to step down as club president so he could devote more time to handling the Old Master's affairs.

"But I still got the job of master of ceremonies, ain't I?" he asked in a heartbroken voice. Elliott grunted he supposed so.

Telling MacDonald to wait for them at the bar and drink whatever he wished at his expense, Shanghai Larry then hustled Gans next door. The Sullivan Trust Company was buzzing. Dozens of clerks and scores of bookkeepers were tabulating the thousands of stock-purchasing orders that had come in by mail from all over the country that morning. It was that way at the trust company every day—while it lasted.

Shanghai Larry took Gans into his private office and introduced him to his partner, George Graham Rice. Rice looked and talked like a conservative banker, and found this most helpful. Rice, one of the greatest operators in the history of swindling, was the brain behind the operations of the Sullivan Trust Company. He had previously been both a crack reporter and a two-time loser in Eastern penal institutions.

Later, during the frenzied twenties, his operations in New York cost thousands of naïve investors between twenty and forty million dollars and earned him the sobriquet of "Jackal of Wall Street."

"If Rice could have put his head to honest use," Kid Highley said not long ago, "he could have been a billionaire."

Even putting it to improper use, Rice in Goldfield was doing much better than all right. Millions of dollars were flowing through his happy hands.

If for nothing else, the world is indebted to Mr. Rice for the report on Shanghai Larry's conversation that day with Joe Gans.

The Negro champion did a little dance of joy and thanksgiving on learning that all his new and generous manager required was a promise that he would defeat Nelson.

"If you lose," Shanghai Larry explained in the kindest tone of which he was capable, "you'll never get out of Goldfield alive. My friends are gonna bet a ton of money on you. They will kill you if you don't beat Nelson by a mile."

Gans grinned. He explained he could beat Nelson with one

hand, if necessary, and that he was eager to win as decisively as possible to redeem himself in the eyes of the sports world.

"Like I said," Sullivan told him, "we'll take care of your expenses and put up the forfeit money for you—but only on that basis."

"I'm sure I can beat Nelson, boss, and if I had any money I'd bet it on myself."

Sullivan looked at Rice, and they held a whispered conference in the corner. Sullivan then came back to talk to Gans with a broad smile on his face.

"Are you willing to prove your good intentions, Joe?" he asked.

"How can I do that, boss? Like I told you, I ain't got a quarter."

"If you're on the level, Joe, you can prove it by turning over your end of the purse to me to bet on yourself at the best odds I can get. How about it?"

"Why not?" said Joe Gans, who had always been able to win when allowed.

Sullivan had arranged for the champion to train at the Mechanics' Hotel, a half mile from the center of town. After Gans left, Rice wrote out a sign for Shanghai Larry to put in the trust-company window. It read:

A LARGE SUM OF MONEY HAS BEEN PLACED  
WITH US TO WAGER ON GANS. ALL NELSON  
MONEY COVERED INSIDE.

"I told you, Rice, that I could insure every dollar we bet on Gans," Sullivan said to his partner. "And I'll have him sign a paper tomorrow, turning over his end of the purse to me."

"You have only one-third of the bets insured so far."

"What do you mean, one-third?"

"You still have to make Battling Nelson promise to lose. And you must also make sure that the referee will give Gans the best of it. You see, Mr. Sullivan," Rice said, "I think of everything."

Al Herford, the white man who discovered Joe Gans, owned a restaurant in Baltimore. He first saw Joe, then eleven, in a street fight with a much larger Negro boy. Herford was so impressed by the lad's natural ability that he hired an old pug to give him

boxing lessons. That was the beginning and end of Mr. Herford's help.

Gans, whose real name was Gant, supported himself during the next few years working in a fish market, shucking oysters. In his early teens he fought in a couple of battles royal with other bigger Negroes, and then Herford began getting him small-money bouts at Baltimore clubs.

Gans was sixteen when he began fighting in contests important enough to attract newspaper notice. He won his first eight bouts by knockouts. He won the next eleven, two of these by knockouts, before fighting his first draw. Except for two more draws, one with the Australian will-o'-the-wisp, Young Grippo, Gans continued winning from all comers, regardless of their size or toughness. He loved to fight, was a perfectionist and very proud of his ring record.

Purses were small anyway in those days. For Negroes everywhere, but particularly in Baltimore and other Southern cities, they were microscopic. However, Herford made a meal ticket out of Gans by betting money on him. He could count on Gans—who, at his peak, remained a lightweight weighing under 133 pounds—winning against anybody, even 200-pound heavyweights, and more often than not by a knockout.

After six years of such sterling performances by Gans, Al Herford could find no one who would bet against his boy. He had little trouble convincing Joe, who felt he owed him everything, that it would be more profitable for them both if he lost occasionally. The first time Herford was supposed to have put him under wraps was against Dal Hawkins, to whom Joe lost his first fight, a fifteen-round affair in New York, on October 6, 1896.

It should have been no particular disgrace for anyone to lose to Hawkins. He had a terrific left hook and the ferocity and fighting spirit of a jungle animal. As a boy of seventeen he had won a ninety-round bout with Fred Bogan. The fight had lasted two days. After seventy-five rounds the referee, unable to continue longer, called it a draw. The exhausted fighters went home, came back the next morning, and battled it out for fifteen additional rounds.

But ringsiders who saw Gans fight Hawkins said the Baltimore man had not been trying. Later he was also accused of quitting to Frank Erne, the world lightweight champion, and the rumor went

up and down Broadway that Al Herford had cleaned up on the fight by betting against his own boy.

The suspicions of Gans spread when he knocked out both in return bouts. In 1902, two years after quitting to Erne, he won his world lightweight title by knocking him out in a round. Hawkins he put away twice, once in two rounds and once in three.

A curious thing about Joe's phony fights was that, though he was a picture fighter, he looked as clumsy as any ordinary stumble-bum whenever he tried to lose. And Gans never did learn how to throw a fight convincingly.

Only a few months after Herford got Gans to quit in the first Erne fight, he had him lay down in two rounds to Terry McGovern in Chicago. This was such a wretched performance that Chicago's riot squad had to be called out to restrain the resentful cash customers. The fiasco killed boxing for years afterward in the honest city of Chicago.

But Al Herford again had cleaned up by betting against Gans.

After Joe's unconvincing loss to McGovern, Herford was unable to find anyone naïve enough to bet either for or against his wonder fighter. For some unknown reason he refused to let Joe defend his title against Jimmy Britt of San Francisco. Britt thereupon claimed the title on the grounds that Gans could no longer make the lightweight limit. This belief appeared substantiated when Gans repeatedly fought welterweights and even middle-weights.

The system then used in weighing fighters prevented Joe's rivals from knowing what he actually weighed. The scales were set at the agreed-on mark. If the bar did not budge when a fighter stepped on, he saved his forfeit and that was the end of it.

For five years Joe resumed winning steadily, losing only to Sam Langford, the famous Boston Tar Baby, who was then a welter-weight.

His most impressive performance was in San Francisco against Joe Walcott, the matchless Barbados Demon, for Walcott's world welterweight championship. It was called a draw, though most of those who saw that twenty-round fight between the Negro champions insisted Gans won. After watching Gans slam around Walcott, who was about as dentable as a blacksmith's anvil, Young

Corbett, Terry McGovern's conqueror, said he believed the Old Master could beat any fighter in the ring.

But within a month Herford had Gans in another scandalous fake, this time against Jimmy Britt. The other fake fights had been for betting purposes. This one was more complicated.

The deal between Herford and Willus Britt, who managed his brother, called for the champion to allow Jimmy to make a good showing during the early rounds, then permit him to lose by a foul. If Gans did not double-cross the Britts by turning honest on them, he was to get 32½ per cent of the gate receipts. If not, he would get only 10 per cent. In addition, Herford had to post a \$5,000 guarantee that his chattel would not knock out Jimmy.

This bout proved only that Joe Gans's acting had not improved. He kept falling down before the light-hitting Britt, and the Californian started fouling him as early as the second round. Jimmy fouled Gans so often that Eddie Graney, who was refereeing, disqualified him in the fifth round. Once again the police had to be called out to stop the fans from rioting. In the scandal that followed, Willus Britt, Jimmy Britt, and Al Herford blamed the fracas entirely on Gans.

It was a malodorous affair, and Al Herford found it so distressing to be associated with a dishonest boxer that he washed his hands of Gans. Most fans accepted this as proof that Gans had double-crossed his own manager. Some of them suggested that it probably was not the first time, Gans being a member of an inferior race and therefore not to be trusted as one could a white man.

During the next year the world's greatest fighter could get only two unimportant bouts. And six months before Tex Rickard signed him to fight Battling Nelson, Gans confessed to newspapermen that he had laid down to McGovern and also had agreed to carry Jimmy Britt. He had done it out of gratitude for Al Herford, he said, and also implicated the Britt brothers. All three white men denied the charges and denounced Gans as a faker and a liar. With tears in his eyes, the Old Master swore he would never fake another fight as long as he lived.

Though few boxing fans believed him, they all were eager, down to the last man, to see him fight Nelson, who had been ducking

him, asserting that he could do himself no good beating so notorious a faker, because everyone would suspect that Gans had thrown the fight.

Nelson's claim to the world lightweight title was based on the fact that he had knocked out Jimmy Britt while Britt was claiming the championship. All he had won, of course, was Britt's phony claim. Since knocking out the Californian the year before, Nolan, the Battler's manager, had kept him profitably employed in vaudeville where no ring title, or even a claim to one, has ever been lost.

Nolan had everything to gain by stalling, nothing to lose. His fighter was only twenty-four, seven years younger than the Old Master. Like everyone else in the fight world, Nolan did not believe that Gans could possibly make the lightweight limit, then 133 pounds, and retain his full strength as a fighter, and this was becoming harder each day. Gans had the title, but Nelson was in the driver's seat.

Billy Nolan was wholeheartedly devoted to getting every dime for his man and himself that he could chisel, finagle, or lie his way into.

This is much more than anyone could say for Nelson's former managers. The Battler was born in Copenhagen on June 5, 1882. He was given the incredible name of Oscar Matthew Battling Nelson, and grew up in Hegewisch, Illinois, a place no one has heard of since.

Unlike Gans, Nelson had neither speed, skill, punching power, nor enough adaptability or wit to develop them. Nevertheless he began astounding the Middle West fight fans when he was fourteen. Like Gans, he kept winning fights against heavyweights, even as a teen-ager—but for a different reason. One sports writer wrote:

"Nelson has a curious way of fighting. First he plunges in again and again, inviting the other fellow to hit him on the jaw. When his rival was so tired of hitting Bat's lower maxillary that he couldn't raise his arm above a whisper, Bat took his turn and delivered the final punch. Usually, by that time the other fellow was too tired and discouraged to care to get up, even if he wasn't knocked out."

Nelson also reminded this sports writer of a gray wolf by the

way he showed his teeth in the ring, and by his manner of crouching, protectingly, over his food as he ate.

In his day the Durable Dane's stupidity was considered phenomenal even though he was in a trade in which too much intelligence and imagination can quickly ruin a man. However, the legend that he fought professionally for years before discovering that his managers were being paid for his ring services may be apocryphal. But if it happened to any fighter, Nelson may well have been the one.

The mental sluggishness of the Durable Dane once aroused the curiosity of the New York *World's* Ned Brown, who had studied medicine before falling into the gaudy flytrap of sports journalism. Brown got Dr. Walter B. Peet, the celebrated Columbia rowing coach who had been making a careful study of human endurance, to examine Nelson. The Battler was reluctant. When the sports editor told him the examination would advance science, Nelson asked, "What's science?"

"Never mind," he was told, "just come along."

After taking the Durable Dane's heartbeat, Dr. Peet could not believe his own findings. On checking it twice again, he was still incredulous. The count was forty-seven to the minute, or twenty-five beats less than normal.

"That is slower than a turtle's, or a toad's, heartbeat," Dr. Peet gasped, while Nelson scowled suspiciously. "No wonder he has such magnificent staying power. There are lower heartbeats only among the colder-blooded animals which survived the days of antiquity and the cold of the Ice Age. If this man's heartbeat increased to normal he would become so feverish he would be sick. His wind is superb because he requires so little oxygen."

"Examine his head now, doctor, will you?"

The Battler, on hearing this, gave the sports editor such a menacing look that Dr. Peet postponed the cranial examination and put him through a series of exercises. He said, "His reflexes, you see, Mr. Brown, are very slow. He is like a slow-moving but methodical puppet."

"That's more like it, doc," said Nelson. "I didn't like that remark Mr. Brown made about examining my head, though."

"Why, Battler," cooed the sports editor, "I only wanted your

head measured so I can get the *World* to buy you a hat that will fit you like a glove."

The Durable Dane grumbled that he didn't want to wear a glove on his head. "People will think I'm bats," he said petulantly.

On completing the cranial examination, Dr. Peet decided it might be wiser to communicate his findings to Mr. Brown by telephone. But the *World* man did not hear from him for three days. Then Dr. Peet explained, "You haven't heard from me because I wanted to check my findings. I called up every brain surgeon I know, and finally consulted the curator of the American Museum of Natural History. The curator wished to examine Nelson himself, but I told him it was inadvisable.

"He agreed with the opinion of the surgeons. They all say that unless I made a miscalculation of at least sixty per cent Battling Nelson carries in his head the thickest skull bones of any human being since Neanderthal man.

"It would be difficult to hurt Nelson with a gloved fist. It would be impossible to kill him with the hardest blow ever delivered in boxing history."

In all fairness, it must be said that the ox-dumb Dane always fought as though he knew this, if nothing else.

The manager who handled Nelson's affairs just before Billy Nolan took over was an innocent-looking Irish youth named Murphy.

Murphy worked the Battler like the town pump. But he did get him bouts with such name fighters as Spider Welsh, Eddie Hanlon, Aurelio Herrera, Jimmy Britt, and Young Corbett. Nelson's durability broke the spirit of them all, even though he had to fight Britt twice before knocking him out in eighteen rounds at San Francisco.

With sizable purses coming his way, the Battler developed a deep affection for money. He kept stuffing his ring earnings into his suitcase. Whenever he could obtain a moment of privacy, he would open the suitcase and examine his collection of greenbacks, yellowbacks, and odd pieces of silver. One day in San Francisco, when his cash deposits in the suitcase reached \$10,000, Murphy and the money disappeared.

Realizing this could hardly be a coincidence, the Battler de-



mandated that the police institute a world-wide search without delay. After more than twenty-four hours of anguish for Nelson, railroad coppers reported that they had picked up Murphy and the suitcase on a train headed for Chicago, and were bringing both back.

Nelson said they could bring him the money but need not bother returning Murphy. When the San Francisco coppers called upon him with the \$10,000 intact, the Battler counted it gravely, then gave his autographed picture and best regards to each blue-coat.

Shortly after that Billy Nolan took over the Durable Dane's affairs. During the Battler's year in vaudeville, Billy put Nelson into the ring for only one fight, and this a six-round exhibition with Terry McGovern in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. In this bout Nelson butted Terry so frequently that a sports writer afterward asked him why he had been so vicious in an exhibition with a game fighter who was obviously near the end of his career.

"Butt him?" asked Nelson, raising high both scarred eyebrows. "I didn't butt him. I was only rubbin' my hair in his eyes. Feel that hair of mine. It is spiky, ain't it, just like wire? I rubbed it in Terry's eyes so much that near the end he couldn't see good enough to hit me."

Because of little speeches like that Billy Nolan kept begging the Battler for one privilege besides the joy of sharing his earnings. This was the right to do all the talking for both of them.

"Every time you open your big yap," he said, "you get in trouble. Why can't you be like your old man?"

The almost endless silences of the elder Nelson had fascinated the fast-talking Billy Nolan on the one occasion he had the chance to observe him. This was during the week before his son's eighteen-round fight with Jimmy Britt.

The Battler, swept away by the prospects of winning the Californian's claim to the lightweight crown, had sent money for railroad fare and expenses to his dad in Hegewisch. Mr. Nelson, who had never seen his son fight, thought over the matter for forty-eight hours. Then he told his wife:

"Vell, I vill go."

In San Francisco Nelson put his dad in a luxurious hotel room, took him on a tour of the Barbary Coast resorts, and fed him the

city's most expensive food. Finally he gave his dad a ringside seat to the fight. When Nelson knocked out Britt, his father sat quiet as a sphinx as the fans all around him went mad with excitement.

During all that week Nolan heard Nelson, Senior, utter only three words. They were, "Excuse it, please," after he had hiccuped. On returning to Hegewisch, Mr. Nelson told everyone who asked him about his glorious excursion, "Vell, I saw it!"

He never mentioned the trip again.

Tex had been surprised by the furor his \$30,000 offer made in the newspapers from coast to coast, because he could not think of it as much money. He had too often won or lost more than that in a single night's gambling.

His much-praised ballyhooing stunt of displaying the purse in the bank window was the first thing that occurred to him. Night after night, for years, he had observed how electrically customers in The Northern reacted to the sight of the stacks of newly minted gold dollars on the tables. He knew how seeing gold elated him.

Incidentally, it was at Goldfield that Tex learned that there were clipping bureaus. From the time he subscribed to one he looked at his clippings each morning, even before he asked Billy Murray about the take of the night before.

Not all his early press notices were favorable. "Some of them fellers," he often told Jack Dempsey, "had a lot of fun making up jokes about us. They said we fellers in Goldfield had our necks bowed and tails curled and were going like a bull yearling through a peach orchard."

Newspapermen learn early to detest publicity hounds. The Tex Rickard sort is the exception. He never attempted to conceal the pleasure the attention of reporters gave him. But he neither fawned on them nor once pretended he was doing them a favor in telling them the latest news.

"At Goldfield," said Rube Goldberg recently, "Rickard seemed a shy, self-effacing man who dressed quietly and appeared to consider himself too unimportant—at first—to be interviewed or photographed. His hair was already thinning. He had small, piercing eyes, but he was frank and honest with you, regardless of what

you asked him. He always seemed interested in you. If you walked into his office, he would get up and greet you by name. No matter how busy he was he would take a minute or two out to chat with you. And he was like that with everyone.

"Every once in a while, Tex would call one of us to one side and hand him a twenty-dollar gold piece. Somehow, crude, uneducated guy though he was, he managed to do this graciously. You had the impression that it was you who were doing him the favor by accepting the money. It was always a token of friendship, never a bribe. Incidentally, in 1906 it was considered perfectly all right for newspapermen to accept money from people like sports promoters. I might almost say it was mandatory, considering what we were paid. Fremont Older paid me ten dollars a week for being both sports writer and cartoonist."

But neither Tex's handouts nor his geniality quite explains why he personally got almost as much publicity at Goldfield as either Gans or Nelson. It was the same way in all his subsequent fights. Jack Dempsey, the greatest box office magnet Tex ever found, says of this:

"In every fight Rickard ever put on, he himself furnished at least fifty per cent of the box office draw. Regardless of who the fighters were, they never dragged in more than the other fifty per cent. Sometimes it was much less than that."

Of course, at Goldfield, Tex's very situation as a novice staging his first big fight made him newsworthy. Americans have always been intrigued by the adventures of an innocent who recklessly plunges into some tricky and colorful business he knows nothing about. Imagining themselves in his place, they fear the worst while hoping for the best. And there was Tex's romantic background, of course. Hundreds of photographs of him were published during the month before the fight. There were feature stories about his adventures as a gambler in Alaska, and on the trail, and about The Northern. Rickard's home, the only brick house in a community of tin and wooden shanties, was also widely publicized. The house also had modern plumbing, electric lights, imposing turrets and stained-glass windows, Brussels net curtains, a piano, and other luxuries. Guests of Mr. and Mrs. Rickard were served champagne with their dinner.

But the most sensational feature of the house was its grass lawn. This was not much larger than a doormat, but it too was the only one in town. Water in Goldfield was so scarce it cost 10 cents a pail. The bill for watering that tiny green patch came to \$60 a month. This was more than many of the reporters who wrote about it earned. But, as Tex told them, it made a pleasant play spot for his little daughter Bessie.

Until Tex Rickard stole his spot in the limelight, Sunny Jim Coffroth, head of the San Francisco Fight Trust, was the country's No. 1 promoter of boxing shows in the United States. It was Sunny Jim who perfected the system, later copied by Tex, which insured the cash customers' getting the seats they paid for and otherwise being treated by the attendants as something better than sneak thieves and wife beaters.

Coffroth's Fight Trust was one of the few privileged groups to survive both San Francisco's earthquake and fire of 1906 and the Ruef-Schmitz municipal scandal that followed it. His associates in the Trust were Morris Levy, Willus Britt, and Eddie Graney, the referee. Graney was nicknamed the Honest Blacksmith because he had started life in that wholesome trade, and Tuxedo Eddie because he was the first referee on the West Coast to wear evening clothes while working in the ring.

Sunny Jim, by the way, got his nickname not because of a sweet disposition, but for his foresight in selecting only sunny days for his outdoor boxing shows. A robust, red-cheeked man, he always kept a copy of Shelley or Keats on his desk and claimed he had read both *Les Misérables* and *Wuthering Heights* from cover to cover.

Coffroth had been angling for the Gans-Nelson fight for months. It irked him to lose it, particularly to some hick gambler from Alaska that no one had ever heard of before.

In his San Francisco office, Sunny Jim was gloomily studying a newspaper photograph of the \$30,000 in the Goldfield bank window, when Tuxedo Eddie came storming into his office waving a postcard. This was from Morris Levy, the man Sunny Jim had dispatched to Utah to sew up Nelson through Billy Nolan. It was postmarked Denver, where Mr. Levy said he was visiting some dear old friends but would proceed to Ogden shortly.

"Nelson and Nolan aren't even in Ogden," Eddie Graney wailed. "They're in Salt Lake City this week."

Sunny Jim was still scowling at the photograph of the stacks of gold pieces.

"Stage money!" he roared indignantly. "Why didn't *we* ever think of that?" He instructed Graney to depart immediately for Goldfield and expose the fraud. Coffroth still intended to bag the Gans-Nelson fight, and without putting up any such walloping guarantee.

On arriving at Goldfield Graney hurried to the John S. McCook Bank where he stared for several minutes at the 1,500 twenty-dollar gold pieces in the window. They did not look phony to him. Then he hurried to Rickard's office at The Northern and introduced himself.

"How can you expect to make money on this fight in the middle of the desert?" he demanded. "In San Francisco, yes, but here—"

Tex flicked the ash off the end of the dollar Havana cigar he was smoking. "We're not putting it on, Graney, to make money," he explained. "It's just a little promotion stunt to help sell stocks in the gold mines we have around here. The other saloon boys are all behind me, too.

"As you might have read in the papers, I raised fifty thousand dollars' backing for this fight in less than an hour. By the next day forty-two thousand more backing was offered me. But I must say, friend, that the way ticket reservations have been coming in, I guess I won't have to use a nickel of that ninety-two thousand dollars."

Graney, who did not believe a word of this, explained that a hundred San Francisco merchants had each thrown five hundred dollars into a pool to bring the fight there.

"Fifty thousand dollars, eh?" said Rickard thoughtfully. Then he called in a porter who was sweeping the floor outside his office.

"Now, Pete," he told him, "go down to my room and bring me up about fifty thousand in cash. I feel like playing a few hands of pinochle before dinner."

Graney was a whipped man. Before leaving for San Francisco he humbly asked Tex for the refereeing job at the fight. Rickard, beaming, said he would be very happy to consider him.

This episode got into the newspapers along with practically everything else Tex did or said that month. When he received a wire from Terry McGovern in New York, offering to fight both Gans and Nelson in turn on the same night for a \$30,000 purse, winner take all, he showed the telegram to the reporters.

Next day he converted another wire from Joe Humphreys into headlines. This one was prepaid, and full of contrition and lies. Joe asserted he had never seen Tex's original wire because the telegraph company had delivered it to a former manager of McGovern's, who signed the insulting answer with his, Joe Humphreys', name. Tex made new headlines out of this wire by announcing he planned to match McGovern and Britt for a \$15,000 purse.

Much more journalistic delicatessen was published as the days rolled by. There were feature stories, news items, pictures about the physical-culture nut who wanted Joe Gans to train by running backwards . . . the pink notes Nelson received daily from feminine admirers . . . a bull sticker from France who wanted to put on an exhibition of his art as a sideshow just before the main event started . . . the minstrel, George Devil, who was planning a cakewalk and watermelon dance the night before the fight; . . . the sensation the millionaire banker L. M. Sullivan was making by taking over Gans's affairs so completely. . . .

But not everybody was going to the fight. "Let-er-go" Billy Jordan, the West's greatest fight announcer, for example, was very bitter about Mr. Sullivan's taking over his job. And Let-er-go Billy took it out on all Goldfield, which he described as a place so hot that the thermometers there had to be a foot longer than everywhere else. "You can throw an egg up in the air there and it will be hard-boiled before it hits the ground," sneered Jordan. "At night the coyotes up there sing a sweet falsetto to get you out on the desert and make a feast of you. The fleas have ravenous appetites. Anyone who wants to brave the sun and the sand and the desert to see *that* fight is welcome to it."

There was also the inevitable abundance of training-camp stories—daily details of how hard the men were training, their moods, what they ate and drank.

The fine ballyhooing hand of Mr. Rickard can be seen working

the best of these into the script. This concerned an afternoon session for ladies only at Nelson's camp. The Durable Dane, despite the denseness of his skull and his battered, badly bent face, had always been a favorite of the girls. One hundred and fifty of them attended the training session. One prissy reporter complained that the term "the gentler sex" could not be applied to any of the women at Nelson's "ladies' matinee." Some of those who attended the matinee of fisticuffs, he wrote, carried guns, others had wandered across the Western states while prospecting for gold, and many "are what you might call 'Ladies of Fortune.'"

The achievement for which Tex Rickard won the most praise—dragging boxing out of the gutter and making it respectable—started with his first fight promotion. In one story Tex was quoted as claiming he had already received five hundred reservations for the fight from ladies, and that a New York brokerage firm was arranging to charter a train to bring hundreds of fans to see the fight. Tex admitted he couldn't say just how many of the great city's leading society women would join that junket, but he guaranteed that Nevada's "400" would be well represented on the distaff side as "nearly every society woman in Goldfield would see the fight."

The reporters who took all this down were considerate enough not to ask him to name the local dowagers and debutantes who would be out cheering for the Old Master or the Durable Dane on Labor Day.

Billy Nolan's despicable and cynical behavior became the big running story from the day he arrived in Goldfield with Battling Nelson. Presumably, the repeated threats of murder which his chicanery and insolence inspired encouraged Easterners to believe that they might see an old-fashioned Western shooting or lynching bee in Goldfield. With the Great Plains getting all combed out and prettified, some of them may have felt it was their last opportunity to catch a glimpse of men of the Old West in action.

Nolan had hardly shaken hands with Rickard before he told him that he understood the wired offer of \$30,000 was just for Nelson's end. When Tex replied he had intended the money to be the entire purse, Nolan said, "Okay, we'll go back home."

Between what he'd read in the papers and the looks of the little town, he could see that Goldfield was determined to put on the fight, whatever it cost. He did not carry out his bluff to start home, but the wrangling about the money lasted for hours. The argument ended only when the disgusted Rickard hiked up the purse to \$33,500. The new deal called for Nelson, the challenger, to get \$22,500 of this, or more than twice the champion's end of \$11,000. Being broke and wildly eager to redeem himself before the public, Gans readily accepted this inequitable arrangement. Everyone relaxed that night. However, Nolan had thrown only his first Sunday punch.

"From the day Nolan came in," said Tex, "he put us in a high fever. He made trouble almost every day with his endless naggin'. If I hadn't been able to protect poor Joe Gans to some extent, Nolan would have skinned him out of everything down to the gold in his teeth."

After making off with more than two-thirds of the purse, Nolan concentrated on adding to Joe's weight-making problems. Apparently he did not realize how difficult even the Old Master would find it to knock out Nelson. The Battler's only chance, his acidulous little manager felt, was to weaken Gans by insisting he weigh in under impossible conditions. But Nolan's first demand was that an 18-foot-square ring be substituted for the regulation 24-foot one. Gans knew the smaller ring might give an advantage to Nelson, who was notorious for his dirty in-fighting tactics.

But Joe was so cocksure of winning that he agreed. His one request was that he and the Battler weigh in at noon, three hours before the fight.

Nolan laughed in his face. "So you'll have a chance to eat a steak before the fight?" He turned to Rickard. "They'll weigh in at ringside, or we'll go home right now."

Again Gans gave in. His banker-manager, Shanghai Larry, blustered around but didn't know how to cope with Nolan. In the end, by imposing new conditions each time he won a point, Nolan had the deal he wanted. The men would weigh in three times on Labor Day: at noon, 1:30, and at three o'clock, ringtime. Nolan also forced Gans to agree to weigh in wearing his ring togs—shoes,



gloves, and trunks. If Joe was a fraction of an ounce overweight at any of the three weighins Nolan intended to claim the forfeit.

"And Gans will have to wear togs that will stand the brunt of battle," Nolan told reporters. "Any shoes that will hang together will weigh at least three-quarters of a pound. And if Gans comes into the ring with flimsy slippers he will blister his feet badly in that ring."

One day the San Francisco *Bulletin* published a Rube Goldberg cartoon of Billy Nolan, captioned "The Bandit." It showed Mr. Nolan with a bandanna concealing half of his face, and with a six-shooter in his hand.

Nolan just shrugged when Goldberg showed the drawing to him.

On another day an armed mob of five hundred miners in a lynching mood assembled and started to march on Nelson's training camp. They were dissuaded by Rickard and Ole Elliott. Ole said his heart was with the local vigilantes but so much money had already been invested that a necktie party would be too expensive to be any fun.

Rickard told reporters, "If this fight is called off, Nolan and Nelson will leave the state in a hurry and they will go out of it stripped of every cent they have. I won't stand for any more of this nonsense."

But the discussion about the selection of a referee alone promised to be interminable. Captain J. F. Mitchell, a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor, said he would like to referee the fight, but with a shotgun in his hands. Billy Nolan, unintimidated, again employed his swarm-of-hornets approach.

"No matter what man you ask for," he told Gans, "we won't agree, even if he's the referee we wanted ourselves."

But it was Shanghai Larry who let out a blast of indignation when Rickard named George Siler of Chicago third man in the ring. Sullivan charged that Siler, who had been the referee the night Gans threw the fight to Terry McGovern, was prejudiced against Negroes.

The choice of a referee was far more important a half century ago than it is today. There were no judges, and the referee's de-

cision was final. He had an added responsibility because bets were paid off on fouls in those quaint old days.

The evening Sullivan lodged his complaint he told George Graham Rice that it was just a strategic move. He now believed Siler would bend over backward to give Gans all the breaks.

"Just to prove he ain't got race prejudice," he explained to Rice. Instead of giving him the praise Shanghai Larry craved, his suave partner merely remarked, "It is lamentable you are unable to get the ear of Mr. Nelson or Mr. Nolan, isn't it, Mr. Sullivan?" The head of the Sullivan Trust Company did not reply. He didn't know, for one thing, what the word "lamentable" meant. However, he judged from Rice's tone that it was not flattering.

When Siler, an aging man with drooping white mustaches, arrived, Mr. Sullivan met *him* at the station and took him directly to his private office. He told Siler the press was waiting to interview him in the inner sanctum of the trust company. After the reporters had left, Sullivan asked Siler to assure him that he would give Joe Gans a fair deal, and by way of encouragement added, "Remember, if you don't keep your word you'll have as much chance of getting out of Nevada alive as Gans will have if he lays down."

Siler gave the required assurance.

The Chicagoan later proved himself to be the only man in Goldfield who knew how to defeat Nolan's needling tactics. When Nelson's manager demanded that Siler promise not to touch the fighters with his hands in case of a clinch, Siler asked, "How do I separate them?"

"Verbally," snarled Nolan. "That's what I had them put in the contract." And he showed Siler the contract, which stipulated that the referee could only order the men to break "by word of mouth."

"But they wouldn't have agreed to that, Billy," Siler told him, "if they had known you had paresis."

Nolan was so staggered by this falsehood that he did not pursue the argument. But on the day before the fight he issued a blast against Rickard, whom he had been praising until then as a man of honor whose word alone he'd take on a deal involving anything up to \$100,000. Said Mr. Nolan, "All this trouble about

rules, regulations, and concessions to Nelson is due to the inexperience of the fight promoters. They may be very wise to the ways of the roulette wheel and the faro box but they don't know anything more about boxing than a coyote. They bungled everything from the start, but everything is settled now."

And then, as though Gans was the only principal whose life had been threatened, he added, "They will also fight. If there is any delay before that crowd, even if there are lots of ladies present, it will be short. These miners who eat sagebrush and alkali are man-eaters too. They will not merely hiss and catcall if the fight is delayed. A little high shooting is more in their line."

But even the cavortings of a Billy Nolan one day come to an end.

Labor Day, September 2, 1906, dawned bright, hot, and clear. The trains from all points of the compass continued to roll in to Goldfield until five o'clock that morning. Thousands of miners came in from Tonopah and other mining towns. For the first time since the boom started, the mines in the entire area had shut down so everyone could attend the fight.

With fifteen thousand outsiders doubling the normal population, few persons had been able to calm down long enough to go to bed the night before. The Northern and Goldfield's fifty-three other gambling saloons bulged with customers. Hundreds of visitors were depressed because they were unable to reach the gambling tables to lose their bankrolls. A great many of them got drunk, were robbed by pickpockets of their money and reserved seats, and never saw the fight at all.

The gala day started with morning rock-drilling contests, burro races, and foot races. A Chicago broker who repeated a rumor that Nelson and Nolan had been seen leaving town had to be rescued from a gang of Tonopah sports who threatened to shoot him full of holes.

Early in the afternoon everyone started out for the arena, which was out on the desert about a half mile from town. Tex had built this of 214,667 feet of green lumber which he had obtained at Reno on almost on-the-cuff terms. He paid \$50 per thousand feet for the lumber, with the provision that he could return it

after the fight and get four-fifths of his money back. Who was going to pay for pulling apart the big wooden bowl was not mentioned in the deal, however.

The arena, with a seating capacity for 7,926 persons, had been constructed in ten days at a total cost of \$13,000. It was only a teacup compared to the vast stadia Rickard put up later for fights at Reno, Toledo, and Jersey City. But all his bowls were a joy and delight to the dry-cleaning and pants-mending industries because the green lumber oozed sap in the hot sunshine. At Toledo half of the audience was unable to stand up to cheer Dempsey after he knocked out Jess Willard. One sentimental observer, who had been drinking gin in the hot sun, was moved to tears on seeing this. He thought the crowd was expressing its sympathy for the fallen champion, Willard, who was unable to stand up either.

At the ringside at Goldfield that day were Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., son of the President; Charles Clark, the Montana copper tycoon; and Nat C. Goodwin, the Broadway star, who was the guest of George Graham Rice. There were three hundred women present.

"It looked like the California days of '49," wrote Barton W. Currie in the *New York Evening World*. "Miners came in with their buckskin bags of dust and nuggets. Here and there a miner would offer to bet his gold mining claim against another . . . as though mines were no more than ragged \$10 bills." There had been little preflight betting, because of the large assortment of imponderables involved, but "in the arena they were betting without the aid of poolrooms. In the scorching sun commissioners were jingling pockets full of \$20 gold pieces . . ."

The odds were ten to six on Gans. Larry Sullivan was offering \$1,000 at even money on Gans to draw first blood, \$1,000 more for Joe to score the first knockdown. There were no takers.

At noon, first Nelson, then Gans, weighed in for the first time. The scales, set at 133 pounds, did not stir. It was the same story at the second weighin, at 1:30 P.M.

W. W. Naughton wrote that Gans, who had been training like a fanatic, looked "as thin as a bone and dry as a chip." The Old

Master had taken extraordinary precautions to safeguard L. M. Sullivan's \$5,000 forfeit: he had shaved every hair off his head, face, and body and wore no socks. He had even tied his ring shoes with thin string instead of shoelaces because these would weigh a trifle less.

At two o'clock the semifinal between two middleweights—Jack Clifford and Bobby Lundie—started. It was scheduled for fifteen rounds. But Clifford knocked out Lundie in the second.

At 2:15 the ring was empty—and the crowd began waiting for the main event.

Nothing happened.

The wildest rumors started circulating. Gans had dropped dead of terror. Nelson and Nolan had been seen getting on a train to San Francisco. But at three o'clock sharp, Nelson stepped on the scales, and then Gans, for the third time that day. Again the bar did not move. Spies in Gans's camp had repeatedly advised Nolan that the champion was going to make the weight. But he hadn't believed them.

A great cheer went up in the arena for Gans when the men at long last stepped into the ring. Nolan and Nelson were received with hoots and hisses.

Bubbling over with pride and excitement, Gans's self-appointed manager bounced out of his seat, climbed through the ropes, and walked into the center of the ring to do his stuff in his secondary role as master of ceremonies.

Shanghai Larry's great moment had come. His first announcement was that there were three hundred "armed deputies" in the crowd. He gravely warned the rest of the pistol-packing audience not to start anything in the way of disorder. Next he read a telegram from the revered old bare-knuckles heavyweight champion of the world, John L. Sullivan. The Boston Strong Boy's wire said:

SORRY I CAN'T MAKE THE FIGHT. IT OUGHT  
TO BE A CORKER. MY REGARDS TO ALL  
ESPECIALLY THE SULLIVANS.

Then, to his partner Rice's vast amusement, Shanghai Larry appeared to become ring stage-struck, though his first mistake seems to have been purely a matter of grammar. This was when he

introduced Rickard as a man who had come to Goldfield without much money but since "has culminated a fortune."

He next introduced Eddie Hanlon, a crack lightweight, as Eddie Graney, and then started to get out of the ring without having introduced either Gans or Nelson. He was called back by the sneering Billy Nolan, and completed his assignment.

Just before the fight started, Joe was handed a telegram from his mother. Its last four words became immediately a part of our language. The wire read:

JOE, THE EYES OF THE WORLD ARE UPON YOU.  
EVERYBODY SAYS YOU OUGHT TO WIN. YOUNG  
PETER JACKSON WILL TELL ME THE NEWS AND  
YOU BRING HOME THE BACON.

As the men stepped to the center of the ring one could have heard a cough anywhere in the arena. The suspense was almost unbearable. But the pattern for the fight was cut in the first round.

For the first moment or two of that round Nelson attempted to box with Gans. He looked absurdly awkward. Gans delivered two savage left jabs quickly, then began peppering the Durable Dane's face with hooks and more jabs.

The crowd settled back. It was a primitive spectacle with everyone waiting to see just how much bruising punishment the white man could take against this Negro who boxed like a ballet dancer and hit like a battering ram.

That was all the fight there was for the first ten rounds. Gans kept outboxing and outslugging Nelson while the Dane, moving always too slowly, telegraphed his punches and waited for the Old Master to tire from hitting him.

If Billy Nolan, in Nelson's corner, had known just how rugged his boy was, the result might have been different. But, beginning with the eleventh round, he instructed Nelson to roughhouse Joe. From then on, Nelson hauled Gans around the ring, wrestling as often as he boxed, and trying to punish the Baltimorean with body blows delivered at close range.

Rice, sitting next to Sullivan, whispered after the twelfth round, "This isn't the cinch for Gans you claimed it was going to be."

At the end of the round Sullivan went to Gans's corner and spoke to him. He told Rice when he sat down again, "Gans says if he can't win this fight, he won't lose it. He'll pull us out. But," Shanghai Larry added, "don't bet any more money."

However, the ringside odds on Gans had risen to two to one. In the twelfth round Nelson began butting Gans. Gans protested to the referee, and cries of "Foul!" came from his corner.

In the fifteenth round Nelson tripped and fell on the canvas. Gans held out his hand. Nelson took it to pull himself to his feet, then, still holding Joe's hand, bashed away at Gans's body.

"It was a vicious trick and it caught Gans utterly unprepared," wrote Charles E. Van Loan next day in the Los Angeles *Examiner*. "Gans staggered back with a bewildered look on his face. There were hisses and boos from all over the wooden arena. But at the bell the Battler kicked Gans in the shins and Joe kicked back at him."

In the eighteenth Nelson hit Joe below the belt.

Continuing his butting and roughhousing, and indifferent to the referee's warnings and the crowd's yelled protests, Nelson in the twenty-third round seemed to have turned the tide in his favor. But Gans came back refreshed in the twenty-fourth. Nelson again hit him below the belt. In the next round the Durable Dane was punched groggy.

The ringside odds were now three to one on Gans, with no takers. In the thirty-second round Gans broke a bone in his left hand. He went on fighting. Not even his seconds knew about the broken bone until the fight was over. Joe just kept on lashing and slugging his open target with both hands. Nelson continued fouling and gouging.

It seemed clear that both the referee and the crowd were nearing the end of their patience. And, as though giving up hope of winning, Billy Nolan kept yelling from the corner, "Foul him! Foul him!"

Nelson had one eye closed. His whole face was bulged out of shape and black-and-blue. Still he went on, doggedly using his elbows and butting Gans, gouging and hitting low. Gans was bleeding copiously from both ears and his mouth.

In the forty-second round Nelson drove his right hand into Gans's groin with all the power he had left. Gans went down, rolled

over, and lay there, quivering convulsively and holding his hands between his legs. The place was in an uproar. There were screams of "Foul! Foul!" from every corner of the bowl.

"You saw that, didn't you, Siler?" roared the ubiquitous Shanghai Larry. "It's a foul, isn't it? Gans wins, doesn't he?"

Siler, his face white, walked over to Nelson and disqualified him.

Without bothering to get back into the ring, Mr. Sullivan yelled, holding both hands aloft, "Gentlemen, the referee declares Gans the winner on a foul!"

From his dressing room Joe Gans sent a wire to Baltimore. It read:

MAMMY, YOUR BOY IS BRINGING HOME THE  
BACON WITH LOTS OF GRAVY ON IT.

"It was all a matter of the betting," Billy Nolan told reporters. "The referee was paid to give it to Gans."

There was some talk of riding Nelson and Nolan out of town, but nothing came of it. The pair couldn't leave because Nelson was all lumps and bruises.

The fight had been almost a sellout. During the semifinal, Tex noticed there were a couple of hundred bleacher seats unoccupied, and ordered that anyone who wanted to should be admitted free.

But the fans of America had spent \$69,715 to see his first show. After paying the fighters, and \$23,000 in other expenses, Tex cleared for himself a net profit of \$13,215. He also had given the town of Goldfield a million dollars' worth of free advertising.

The two hundred Pullman cars that had brought in people from all parts of the country started pulling out late that afternoon. But nobody who saw the Gans-Nelson fight ever forgot it—or the man who put it on.



# 9

## The jackass that kicked back

THAT NEW YEAR'S EVE Shanghai Larry tried to shoot Tex Rickard. It was an act that any criminal defense lawyer who knew his trade would have attributed to frustration, intolerable anguish induced by aggravation, and drunkenness—in that order.

The Gans-Nelson fight had carried Goldfield to new heights of prosperity. By that November there was \$15,000,000 on deposit in its banks, real estate along Main Street was selling for \$1,000 a front foot, and a \$50,000,000 company had taken over all but one of its most lucrative mines.

But the Sullivan Trust Company had started to fall apart on the very morning after the bout. On that day so many of its stocks were dumped on the San Francisco Stock Exchange that George Graham Rice wired more than \$100,000 in buying orders to bolster their prices.

Rice blamed this on Mr. Sullivan's ungrammatical performance in the ring. He scoffed, "Peanuts!" each time Shanghai Larry tried to crow over the \$32,500 they had won betting on Gans.

On top of all this, wherever Mr. Sullivan went he had to listen to Tex Rickard's promotional genius being praised. That set him

truly to brooding over the world's ingratitude. As far as Mr. Sullivan could see, it was his death threats to Gans and referee Siler, rather than anything Tex had done, that had insured the success of the fight.

Just before Christmas week he fled to Tonopah to escape his partner's increasingly pointed criticisms. He also hoped to hear less there about Rickard, as Jim Reilly, who ran Tonopah's best gambling saloon, was trying to duplicate Tex's success by staging there another world lightweight title fight, this one between Joe Gans and Kid Herman of Chicago, on New Year's Day.

In Tonopah, Mr. Sullivan got drunk and stayed that way. On New Year's Eve he staggered into Reilly's place to find Tex at the bar, and surrounded by just the sort of he-men Shanghai Larry wistfully wished would admire him. The group included Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, the world light-heavyweight champ; Rex Beach, the two-fisted author; Nate Lewis, Kid Herman's manager; and Jack Curley, who later on became Rickard's most imaginative rival promoter.

To the befuddled Mr. Sullivan it seemed the perfect time to show up Rickard "for the four-flusher he was." Lurching across the room, he crashed into Tex. "So *you're* the big promoter from Goldfield, are you?" he said with concentrated petulance. "What's big about you, your head or your feet?"

Rickard looked him over calmly, then straight-armed him away, and crowned the insult by turning his back. He had heard that Shanghai Larry had seven notches in his gun, but was unimpressed. Mr. Sullivan, however, was in no mood to be ignored. He kept bumping into Rickard again and again. What happened after that was a story that Jack Curley always liked to tell.

"Sullivan kept coming back," Curley said, "each time adding another blue streak of insults. Tex seemed to be doing his best not to seem annoyed. Then Sullivan whipped out his gat. He was roaring drunk and ugly as a bear.

"You could have heard a pin drop. When Rickard turned and saw that Larry had a gun in his hand, he grabbed it. I never saw a man move quicker. It was as though a panther's paw had shot out and grabbed the gun.

"A quick twist of the wrist and he had the six-shooter out of

Sullivan's hands. He tossed the gun into a far corner of the place. Then, without a word to Sullivan, he turned his back again, picked up his drink from the bar, and downed it. Larry stood there a minute with fists clenched, then staggered away.

"Nate Lewis looked at me. 'Am I seeing things?' he asked. 'I never knew a man could be that game.'"

What most impressed Beach was Rickard's patience. "You wouldn't have waited that long in the old days to throw a drunken killer out of a saloon," he said.

"Let's forget it," Rickard replied. "All that bum was looking for was a chance to brag for the rest of his life how he had scared me."

Beach judged from this that the fame that had come to him with the Gans-Nelson fight made Tex feel he must conduct himself with more dignity and self-restraint than ever before.

Shortly after that Tex had an adventure with another drunken killer in his Goldfield saloon that left him with a deeply scarred thumb.

This man, far gone in his cups, had come into The Northern that night, waving a six-shooter. When Rickard tried to disarm him, the killer pulled the trigger of his revolver. The hammer came down on Tex's thumb, pinning it to the weapon. As the bouncers grabbed the gunman and threw him out, Rickard in his pain shook off the weapon, which took along a strip of flesh as it fell to the floor.

A week later the gunman was back and looking for more trouble. On this occasion a deputy sheriff followed him outside and killed him in a gun duel.

"Glad all that action and excitement took place on the street," says Kid Highley. "Spilling blood all over a gambling saloon never helped its business none."

Much of the crazy fun and lighthearted hell raising went out of Goldfield's community life that winter. There was a series of blizzards that crippled transportation and halted work in the mines. The gold camp's destitute had such a difficult time keeping warm that they pulled wooden buildings to pieces and stole the wood foundations from under their neighbors' tents for fuel.

The Gans-Herman fight at Tonopah was a victim of the vicious

desert weather. It was held in an unheated, barnlike building. The few hundred fans who attended came wearing earmuffs and scraggly old fur coats. To ward off pneumonia the seconds wrapped their men in heated blankets between rounds, instead of fanning them. Even Nate Lewis was not too distressed when Gans ended the bout by knocking out Herman in the eighth round.

There was another depression during 1907, which threw millions out of work, and a strike in the Goldfield mines that only ended after Army troops were sent in to police the area.

The Rickards suffered a personal tragedy that year, when their adopted daughter, Bessie, became gravely ill. Rushed to New York for an emergency operation, the child died in the operating room. Tex blamed the surgeon and refused to pay his bill.

Prostrated over the death of her little girl, Edith Mae became so ill that Tex sent for his mother-in-law to take care of her. From that day on, Mrs. Myers lived with the Rickards, and Edith Mae most of the time was a semi-invalid.

As in Alaska, new gold strikes were reported in Nevada every few weeks. Early in 1908 Tex sold out his share of The Northern to follow a stampede to Rawhide, 150 miles across the desert. He made the trip in his big touring car in a single day, which was considered very fast desert traveling at the time.

That same evening Rickard bought an \$8,000 lot in the center of the red-hot boom town. Ten days later he had his building up—it measured 30 by 100 feet—and threw a grand ball which George Graham Rice, who was present, described as being “celebrated by an orgy that cut a new notch for functions of this kind in southern Nevada. The games were reported to have won the house \$25,000 on this first day. Champagne was a common beverage. Day was merged into night, night into day. Rouged courtesans of Stingaree Gulch provided a dash of femininity . . . to the grand *bal masque* that concluded the festivities.”

Kid Highley, who was Rickard’s partner in the new venture, says it cleared an average profit of \$1,000 a day during the next three months.

Rice, who was in Rawhide in the hope of swindling his way into another fortune, welcomed Rickard. Tex’s close association

with this notorious thief is worth study. Like any other con man, Rice was contemptuous of honest folks, whom he saw only as chumps waiting to be fleeced. But Rice, who was just about Rickard's age, was broad-minded enough to overlook Tex's integrity. And his admiration for Rickard's genius for ballyhoo, like Wilson Mizner's, lasted.

Almost twenty years later, when Rice was uncorking his gigantic Wall Street stock-market frauds, he told his brochure writer, Martin Mooney, "I want you to roll this one in typical Rickard style. Emphasize, as he would, the bigness of the project, and keep emphasizing it."

When Mooney, who won fame a few years later as a crime reporter, was asked what Rice thought of Tex's lifelong reputation for honesty, he said, "As far as I could ever gather, he regarded it as a whim."

Rickard's willingness to work hand in hand with a man he knew to be a notorious crook is equally interesting in view of his often-repeated claim of never having met any thieves until he was forty and living in New York. For Rice had recently been exposed in the Nevada newspapers as the worst thief in the state and an ex-jailbird whose real name was Jacob Simon Herzig.

Herzig, though a member of a respectable, well-to-do family, was so incorrigible as a teen-ager that his father, a New York City manufacturer, had been unable to prevent the authorities from sending him to the reformatory. Later Rice attended college for a couple of years, then became a reporter in New York. On November 19, 1895, he forged his father's name to a \$548 check, a crime for which he was sentenced to Sing Sing for six and a half years.

On being released four years later, Herzig adopted the alias of George Graham Rice. Soon afterward he made his first terrific stake, \$3,000,000 out of a racing tipster service he ran with a partner in New York. But Rice, always a spendthrift, swiftly blew his share of the loot at the track.

Going to Nevada, Rice founded an advertising agency in Goldfield which earned \$65,000 during the first six months. He next opened a news bureau and sent out—whenever business was faltering—exciting news stories about local gold discoveries, high play

at the gaming tables, the feuds between its picturesque gamblers, stick-ups, the latest stampedes, murders and hairbreadth escapes from death of its well-known citizens.

"It was not always necessary to make these stories up out of whole cloth," Rice once told Martin Mooney. "Some of those things happened."

Nevada's historians denounce Rice as an unprincipled scoundrel, but also admit that his hopped-up news stories and brilliantly written advertisements were important in bringing in the necessary outside capital to develop the state's resources. In all, this outside capital amounted to \$200,000,000—which means that only three-fourths of it went into worthless mining enterprises.

Rice's smartest gimmick in Goldfield was penny gold stocks, which he sold for from ten cents to one dollar each. He always aimed his advertising copy at intelligent people.

"Never appeal to the ignorance of fools," he said, "no matter how easily they part with their money. Turn your batteries on the thinking ones. Convince them, and the unthinking ones will follow."

With Shanghai Larry as the fall guy in the event of an investigation, Rice turned over money faster than ever through the Sullivan Trust Company. After permitting \$10,000,000 to slide in and out of his restless hands, he found it necessary to take it on the lam out of Goldfield to Reno one dark and stormy night with only \$500 in his kick. He was exposed as a jailbird when he tried to revive the Sullivan Trust Company. Rawhide was his next stop.

Working together as ballyhoo artists, the crooked Rice and straight-as-a-die Rickard were superb. When leaving Goldfield Tex saw an abandoned wooden church and hung this sign on its door:

**THIS CHURCH CLOSED.**

**GOD HAS GONE TO RAWHIDE!**

Some of the newspaper hoaxes he and Rice sent out on the wires from Rawhide compare favorably with those that helped make Mark Twain, H. L. Mencken, and Ben Hecht famous.

One of their news fakes told of what happened when Rawhide

dynamited a boulder in the middle of Main Street. Their story was that in the explosion \$30,000 in gold-bearing ore was scattered in all directions. One chunk crashed through the window of the local bank. After having the window fixed, the bank president paid \$60 for the gold in the rock fragment.

Rice and Rickard also dredged much national publicity for Rawhide out of the death of a well-known gambler named Riley Grannan. They hired W. H. Knickerbocker, a former Methodist preacher, to deliver a sermon which extolled Grannan as "a dead game sport" who had risen by his own efforts from the lowly position of bellboy in a Louisville hotel to "one of the greatest plungers, probably, that this continent ever produced."

Grannan's last request was that he be buried in the bluegrass of Paris, Kentucky, the little town where he was born. This wish was granted after Rice assured his backer, Nat Goodwin, that the publicity about the long journey home would prove well worth the \$1,800 it would cost. This proved correct. Hundreds of newspapers mentioned Rawhide in their stories about the funeral and the day-by-day progress of the casket.

On reading that Elinor Glyn, the famous author of *Three Weeks*, was visiting San Francisco, Tex invited her to visit Rawhide. She accepted, and arrived with two Western-style dandies, Sam Newhouse and Ray Baker. The three were given Rawhide's No. 1 publicity treatment.

"Mrs. Glyn and her two sophisticated companions," wrote Rice of this caper, "were taken to a room where six players were seated around a table. The men were coatless and grimy. Their unshaven mugs, rough as nutmeg graters, were twisted into strange grimaces. All of them appeared the worse for liquor. Before each man was piled a mound of ivory chips of various hues, and alongside rested a six-shooter. From the rear pocket of every player another gun protruded. Each man wore a belt filled with cartridges. Although an impromptu sort of game, it was well staged. A man with blood-shot eyes shuffled and riffled the cards, then he dealt a hand to each.

"'Bet you ten thousand dollars,' loudly declared the first player.

"'Call that and go you fifteen thousand dollars better,' shouted the second as he pushed his stack of yellow chips toward the center.

"'Raise you,' cried two others almost in unison.

"Before the jackpot was played out, \$300,000 (in chips) had found its way to the center of the table and the four men were standing up in their seats in a frenzy of bravado with the muzzles of their guns viciously pointed at one another. There was enough of the lurking devil in the eyes of the belligerents to give the on-lookers a nervous shiver.

"When the gunplay started Mrs. Glyn and Messrs. Newhouse and Baker took to the 'tall and uncut.' As the door closed and the vanishing forms of the visitors could be seen disappearing around the opposite street corner, all of the men pointed their guns heavenward and shot at the ceiling, which was canvas. The sharp report of revolver shots rang through the air. This was followed by hollow groans, calculated to freeze the blood of the retreating party, and by a scraping and scuffling sound that conveyed to the imagination a violent struggle between several persons.

"Fifteen minutes later two stretchers carrying the 'dead' were taken to the undertaker's shop. Mrs. Glyn, Mr. Baker, and Mr. Newhouse, with dropped chins, stood by and witnessed the dismal spectacle."

After Mrs. Glyn had a chance to recover from being so close to two murders, she was taken on a tour of Rawhide's red-light district and also witnessed a sensational fire. To top off the visit, the assistant governor pinned the badge of deputy constable on the fair writer's shapely bosom, and at the last moment a dust-covered miner came riding into town with a handful of yellow daisies for Elinor. He said he'd found them ninety miles away.

"Nowhere in the world," Elinor rhapsodized later, "whether in the houses of the rich or the courts of kings, have I found such chivalry, such a natural sense of the fitness of things, such innate aristocracy as in the mining camps of Nevada." Her biographer, Anthony Glyn, recently wrote, "That visit to Rawhide was to remain one of the happiest memories of her life; indeed one may regard it as a turning point in her spiritual progress."

When the clippings about Mrs. Glyn's visit came in, Tex complained to Rice that many editors of big-city newspapers had seen through the hoax as a publicity stunt and were kidding the town.

"For this sort of proposition," the con man told him, "every



knock is a boost. The mere fact that we could get anyone as well known as Elinor Glyn here will impress people with Rawhide's growing importance."

Tex also learned that one got nowhere publicizing a boom town that quickly turned into a bust. During its fifth month Rawhide succumbed to anemia of the gold yield in the area. Eventually its mines produced a million in gold, but it had been overpromoted. A real fire that destroyed The Northern and most of the rest of the town finished it off. Not long afterward George Graham Rice went off to prison once more.

If Rice clipped Tex Rickard in some of his promotions, Tex never complained about it. After the Rawhide boom, Tex became the front man for a hotel in Ely called the "Northern," was given stock in a bank there for the use of his name, and was commissioned to buy stocks by the Cole interests of Minnesota.

He had scarcely got on his financial feet again when news came that Jack Johnson had won the world heavyweight title from Tommy Burns in Australia. The date was December 26, 1908.

Three and a half years before, Jeffries had "presented" his title to Marvin Hart, a mediocre heavyweight, after Hart knocked out Jack Root at Carson City, Nevada. Later Jeffries denied that he had given away his championship.

But by that time Hart had been knocked out by Tommy Burns, a Canadian who was only 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed between 175 and 180 pounds. Johnson, a Negro, beat Burns with ease.

More than twenty years later Alva Johnston wrote of the effect of Johnson's victory: "The morale of the Caucasian race had been at a low ebb long before the great blow fell in 1908. The Kaiser had been growing hysterical over the Yellow Peril. Africa was still celebrating the victory of Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia over the Italians. Dixie was still in ferment because Booker T. Washington, the Negro leader, had had a meal at the White House. Then . . . Jack Johnson won the World Heavyweight Championship from Tommy Burns. The Nordics had not been so scared since the days of Tamerlane."

It was Jack London, covering the Burns-Johnson fight for the New York *Herald*, who stoked up a terrible fear in the hearts of millions of his fellow Caucasians. The fear was that Johnson's ring

victory would encourage Negroes everywhere to rise up and take over the country. London, a great champion of the proletariat when their skins were the correct color, started his dispatch:

"The fight! There was no fight! No Armenian massacre could compare with the hopeless slaughter that took place today. It was not a case of 'too much Johnson' but 'all Johnson' . . . a golden smile tells the story and the golden smile was Johnson's."

London described how Johnson, almost a half foot taller than Burns and twenty-odd pounds heavier, had taunted the white champion repeatedly, permitting Burns to hit him at will, then laughing in his face. His story ended with the words:

"But one thing remains. Jeffries must emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove that same smile from Johnson's face. Jeff, it's up to you."

Since retiring five years before, big Jeff, a huge man with the punch of a pile driver and the strength of a prize-winning bull, had been running a saloon in Los Angeles and an alfalfa farm on the outskirts of that town.

Jeffries responded with, "Nix! Nothing doing! The alfalfa farm, and the saloon on the side, for mine." He pointed out that as champion he had drawn the color line, and refused time and again to let Johnson have a chance even though he was sure he could defeat him.

"Now, I'm out of the ring for good," he added, "but all night last night and all day today I was besieged by telegrams asking me if I would reenter the ring. Tommy Burns's mistake was in giving Johnson the chance to fight for the championship."

His admirers turned to Jeffries because there was no other white fighter around who could hope to beat Johnson. White fans had no objection to Negroes' holding the titles in the smaller divisions. But a Negro as heavyweight champion meant that he could beat any white man, an idea they could not tolerate, and there were three other Negro fighters—Sam Langford, Joe Jeannette, and Sam McVey—each of whom seemed capable of beating any of the white heavyweights.

The pressure on Jeffries to save the world from the Negro menace increased after Johnson came home and beat in succession Al Kaufman, a giant Californian; Victor McLaglen, who later be-

came a Hollywood film star; and world middleweight champion Stanley Ketchell.

In the Ketchell bout, Johnson had agreed to allow his smaller opponent to stay the scheduled twenty rounds. But in the twelfth Ketchell slipped over a sneak punch, knocking him down. Jack jumped up at once and put Stanley to sleep with a punch so savage that it broke off at the roots every tooth in Ketchell's mouth.

Johnson's behavior outside the ring gave added ammunition to those who hated him. Jack bought himself fast cars which he raced up and down the road wherever he went. And numerous white women considered Jack Johnson far superior as a lover to the white men they had known, and chased him shamelessly. After being divorced by his first wife, a Negro girl, Jack married one of these white women, Etta Duryea, a Brooklyn heiress.

Years later, when Jack made a play for Ethel Waters, the Negro actress, she reproached him for preferring white girls.

"I could love a colored woman," he told her, "but they never give me anything. Colored women won't play up to a man the way white girls do. No matter how colored women feel towards a man, they don't spoil him and pamper him and build up his ego. They don't try to make him feel like he's somebody."

After resisting public pressure for months, Jeffries decided that he might as well save the white race from destruction. He was broke anyway. Jeff started training secretly on his farm early in 1909. Later, he went on a nationwide vaudeville tour with his friend Sam Berger, a San Francisco haberdasher and champion amateur boxer. Jeff also visited Europe, where he took the medicinal baths at Baden-Baden. The most eminent European doctors examined him and pronounced him in perfect condition.

With the leading sports promoters of the world scrambling for the match, Johnson and Jeffries signed an agreement between themselves to fight during July, 1910. This stipulated that all bids for the bout must be submitted, sealed and delivered to them or their representatives, at New York on December 1.

The professional boxing world had written off Tex Rickard's success with the Goldfield fight as a fluke. The one man who thought of him in connection with this vastly more important bout was Art V. Buel, a newspaper cartoonist, who hated Tex. Mr. Buel

published a picture of Rickard in the *Sacramento Bee*, which showed Tex with donkey's ears. It was captioned:

*Where's the big-talking Tex Rickard now?*

Rickard saw it, and winced. "It got my dander up," he said later, "and I decided to show that feller I wasn't such a jackass as he tried to make me out."

Not having enough money of his own, Tex's first problem was to obtain backing. He got all he needed without delay from Thomas F. Cole, the Minnesota millionaire for whose company he had bought mining properties. Then and later, this ability to borrow large sums of money without security whenever he needed it was Rickard's big advantage over professional promoters. It was a terrific asset, but his competitors had everything else. They knew every clean and dirty trick of their curious trade, and few of them were handicapped by scruples. If any one of them had been able to interest the sort of money men Rickard attracted, Tex never would have got the chance to put on another big fight.

Tex told Mr. Cole that he suspected that Jeffries was already signed by one of his rival promoters.

"You'd think," he said, "that the same feller would be smart enough to sew up the colored man. But he seems to think that with Jeff in the bag, Johnson will have to come in, as Gans did at Goldfield, for anything he can get. Well, gentlemen, maybe we can out-smart that same smart feller, whoever he is."

Loaded down with thousand-dollar bills, Tex headed for Pittsburgh, where Jack Johnson was appearing in vaudeville that week. On reaching town, Tex at the last moment had a hunch that the best approach to the champion might be through his white wife. He reasoned that Mrs. Etta Johnson had probably been snubbed so often lately that she might appreciate a friendly call from another white person.

Mrs. Johnson was packing when Tex dropped in at her boarding house and introduced himself. She explained that she and Jack were leaving that night for New York for the opening of the bids.

"Did Jack say anything to you about signing up with any of the other boys who are after the fight?" he asked.

"Jack wouldn't sign anything," she laughed, "without talking it over with me first."

Tex nodded thoughtfully, then said, "I'd buy you just about any kind of present you'd like, Mrs. Johnson, if you could talk him into signing up with me."

"A fur coat, Mr. Rickard?"

"You got yourself a deal, ma'am," said Rickard.

With her cooperation assured, Tex went to call on the champion backstage. Johnson, a high, wide, and handsome spender, made no bones about being broke.

"What about these rumors I hear," said Tex, "that this match has already been arranged?"

Johnson shook his head. "I'm going to tell you something, Mr. Tex," he said. "They ain't got the thing fixed up yet, no matter what they say in the papers. There ain't nobody giving me any money. And that's what I need most now, not newspaper talk."

"How much do you need, Jack?" asked Tex.

"Boss," said Jack Johnson, "if I could get hold of twenty-five hundred dollars it would help a whole armful. I sure would like to fight for you. I don't owe them other fellers nothin'."

Pulling out a big bankroll, Tex picked out two new \$1,000 bills and one \$500 bill. These he laid down on Jack's dressing table, saying, "Jack, if you agree to fight for me, I'll see that no one takes advantage of you."

"Yes, sir," said Jack, his face breaking out into the golden smile that Jack London had written about. "And I'll tell you something else you should know, Mr. Tex. They're gonna bid \$100,000 for this fight. If you put in a bid for \$101,000, you'll get it sure."

Rickard went to New York that night on the same train with the Johnsons. En route the three of them figured out a personal contract agreement which Tex and Johnson signed. On reaching New York, Tex's first act was to buy Mrs. Johnson a sealskin coat. It cost \$75.

Tex wanted no one to know he was in town until he had a chance to talk with Jeffries and Sam Berger, who was now acting as Jeff's manager. But the first man he ran into at his hotel was Vincent Treanor, a New York *Evening World* sports writer, who

laughed heartily when Tex insisted he was in town merely to look things over. Treanor confirmed Johnson's story that the other promoters' bids ran up to \$100,000.

"And don't forget the movie-rights money, Tex," he said. "The man who cuts that dough up for the fighters the smart way will get the bout."

Within the next hour Tex dropped in on Jeffries. Jeff and Berger gave him a cold reception. After a good deal of evasive talk, Rickard was told that the man he must talk business to, if he hoped to get the fight, was Jack Gleason, a reformed Broadway performer and playwright, who lately had returned to his home town, San Francisco, and become Sunny Jim Coffroth's closest friend.

"Everybody says Gleason is partners in this thing with Jim Coffroth," said Tex, shaking his honest head.

"Better see Gleason anyway," he was told.

It took Tex several hours to locate Mr. Gleason, but then, it is true, the pair had a long and interesting conversation. After interminable two-way double talk, Tex let the San Francisco Shakespeare know that he had Johnson sewed up. Gleason rewarded him with the information that, thanks to his friendship with Sam Berger, he had Jeffries in his pocket. This put them, they agreed, in the driver's seat together.

"What about Coffroth?" asked Tex. "Aren't you his partner?"

Gleason answered with a disarming smile. "You understand, Tex," he said, "that Sam Berger and Jeff have to be taken care of—no matter what arrangement we make."

Tex nodded pleasantly enough. After considerable dickering, he consented to put up all the money required, and cut Gleason in on half of the profits.

"Including the movie money?" asked Gleason, a little breathlessly. With Coffroth, he had had to argue himself hoarse and blue in the face to get a much smaller cut.

"Including the movie money, and everything else. But what about Coffroth?"

Gleason said not to worry, he would take care of his friend Sunny Jim. He added, "What worries me is how to keep Jeff and Berger in line. They'll want a ten-thousand-dollar bonus for stringing along with us."

Tex took out his wallet and drew out two \$5,000 bills. He handed these to Mr. Gleason. At least, he started to, then drew the money back.

"I forgot to tell you one thing, Gleason. I'll have to give Johnson a ten-thousand-dollar bonus for signing."

"Why?" asked Gleason in honest amazement.

"Because I promised him he'd get the same bonus Jeff did when we signed our agreement on the train."

"But how is he going to know what you're giving Jeff?"

"Because I'll tell him about it," said Tex.

Five minutes after Tex went on his way, Jackie Gleason walked over to Shanley's Restaurant where Jim Coffroth was waiting for him. "This guy, Tex Rickard, is even a bigger sucker than we thought he was, Jim," he said with a dreamy look in his eyes. "The deal I told you about this afternoon is nothing to the one I can offer you now that I've spoken to the chump."

There was a last-minute hitch in the arrangements made for the opening of the bids. It had been planned that this important ceremony should take place in the ballroom of the Hotel Albany, which was owned by Robert F. Murphy, a popular Broadwayite who was to act as stakeholder of the bids. Newspapermen covering the event, Murphy announced, would be kept in good humor on champagne furnished by the house.

However, William Travers Jerome, New York's fighting district attorney, quarreled with the idea. The night before the great day, he sent a police inspector to warn Murphy that if the bids were opened anywhere in Manhattan, all involved would be arrested. Jerome's argument was that, with professional boxing outlawed in the state, it was clearly illegal for promoters even to bid for a bout there, though it was to be held thousands of miles away.

When Murphy recovered from his astonishment, he arranged with a friend who owned Meyer's Hotel in Hoboken, New Jersey, to stage the rite there. Hoboken is just across the Hudson River from New York, and the party proceeded there by ferryboat. In the group were Murphy, Rickard, Gleason, Eddie Graney, Uncle Tom McCarey of Los Angeles, and Phil King, the American representative of Hugh McIntosh, the Australian promoter who had staged

the Burns-Johnson bout. Also Jack Johnson, his manager, George Little, Sam Berger representing Jeffries, scores of newspapermen, and the usual collection of hangers-on.

Jeffries himself did not show up, but that had been expected. The sensation of the day was the failure of Sunny Jim Coffroth to appear, which put all sorts of rumors into circulation. But Jack Gleason assured the newspapermen that Coffroth had given him final instructions on precisely how far to go if the other promoters proved ready to outbid them.

In his story for the *Evening World* next day, Bob Edgren pointed out that Tex Rickard was the only bidder there who wasn't fat. He described Gleason as being five and a half feet high and six and a half feet wide, and Eddie Graney as short and "built somewhat on the spherical plan of a toy balloon. But Rickard," Edgren wrote, "is tall, lean and sinewy as a cowboy, dark-tanned from exposure to the desert sun and wind, and has a sharp eye, thin lips, straight-nosed countenance, and is as alert as an eagle. He bites his words off in a decisive manner when he talks. He is a typical frontiersman . . . a gambler by profession—just the kind of gambler Bret Harte pictured so delightfully in his stories of California life in the Fifties."

Stakeholder Murphy, who was to open the sealed bids, sat at the head of a large table placed in the center of the Meyer's grand ballroom. Johnson and Little, his manager, were seated at Murphy's right, and Tom McCarey and Sam Berger at his left. The other principals, including Rickard and Gleason, wandered around restlessly among the newsmen and other hangers-on.

The first envelope opened was Eddie Graney's. As president of the Tuxedo Club of San Francisco, the Honest Blacksmith offered the fighters their choice of three deals ranging from 80 per cent of the gate receipts against a \$70,000 guarantee, plus all the film rights, to a straight 90 per cent of the gate receipts plus all movie rights.

Gleason and Coffroth, acting as partners, offered a flat \$125,000 guarantee with no film royalties, or \$75,000 plus two-thirds of the film rights. This bid gave the fighters the option of claiming 80 per cent of the gross receipts plus the two-thirds of the film money, if the gate exceeded \$93,750.

The bid of Hugh McIntosh, the Australian promoter of the



Johnson-Burns battle, which grossed \$75,000, was next read. McIntosh offered \$55,000 for the fight if staged in America; \$100,000 plus one-fourth of the film rights if put on in Australia.

Each promoter had enclosed a certified check for \$5,000 in the envelope containing the bid. As Tex Rickard handed his sealed bid to Bob Murphy, he said:

"You better be careful with this envelope, Murphy. It holds some real money."

A hush fell over the noisy room. Reporters who had not left the bar since arriving swirled with the others around the long table, craning their necks. When the envelope was opened a certified check for \$5,000 and fifteen \$1,000 bills fell out.

One of the promoters said later, "The minute I saw the way Jack Johnson's face changed on seeing that money, I knew I was finished."

The Rickard offer read:

"We offer the fighters the price guarantee of \$101,000 with 66 and two-thirds per cent of movie rights. The bout will be staged on July 4, in California, Nevada or Utah. In addition to the \$20,000 contained in the envelope, \$20,000 more will be deposited sixty days before the fight and an additional \$50,000 48 hours before the encounter."

Tom McCarey's bid was read last. "On behalf of the Pacific Club of Los Angeles, I offer the entire gate receipts and fifty per cent of the movie rights, or a guaranteed purse of \$110,000 with fifty per cent of movie rights."

But Johnson seemed not to be listening. He just kept staring at the fifteen \$1,000 bills at Murphy's elbow. In a husky voice, he asked Murphy's permission to touch them.

McCarey declared, "Let us settle the whole matter here and now."

"Those checks may be all right," Johnson said, "but they don't look so good to this baby as those bills with big numbers on them. I'm not so educated as some of you folks, and I would like time to figure things out. I would like to find out what the difference is between your bid and Mr. Rickard's, considering the fifty per cent you want to give us on movie rights, and the sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of them he offers."

Graney suggested that all the bids be read a second time to avoid

any possibility of misunderstanding. After much talk it was agreed that the principals should consider the different bids overnight, then return for a second meeting at Meyer's.

The sports writers on the second day were barred from the dickering chamber and had to remain outside, angrily getting drunk for free, while awaiting the result of the conference behind locked doors.

After several hours it was announced that Rickard and Gleason had bagged the big prize. The reporters asked if one set of figures had not been agreed upon while another was being given out to the public.

"I laid my cards on the table," wailed McCarey, "but the men who got this bout dealt theirs from the bottom of the deck."

"Oh, forget it," said Graney, "we've *all* been stung on this one."

"Do you know where we showed judgment and put it over on you fellows?" Rickard said to the other promoters. "It was those fifteen thousand-dollar bills. When they went down on the table and I saw Johnson's eyes bulge out, I knew we had him. The rest of it was easy. All you fellows were talking in big figures, but a bunch of thousand-dollar bills is the biggest argument in the world."

That evening W. W. Naughton received telegrams from both Rickard and Coffroth. Tex's announced that he had carried off the prize. Coffroth's wire read,

**RICKARD WILL GET BIG FIGHT BUT I'M NOT A  
BIT DISCONCERTED.**

Naughton interpreted this to mean that Gleason and Rickard had agreed, in return for Coffroth's remaining away from the bidding, to let Sunny Jim be the real promoter. That was the gist of most of the stories published during the next twenty-four hours about the strange goings-on at Hoboken.

Rickard denied this, repeatedly. "Coffroth is out," he said. "He doesn't figure in the deal at all." He thought the fight would take place in Salt Lake City, which he considered more accessible than the Bay City. Gleason argued for San Francisco.

"This will be the biggest thing ever pulled off," Tex kept explaining. "I don't care if I don't make a dollar out of it. The handling

of the biggest fight in the world will be enough glory for me. My ambition now is to handle the thing right—dead right. It'll be on the square in every way. I'll guarantee that. We'll have some new ideas, too." Tex then reverted to his favorite theme.

"In the first place we are going to make it possible for women—good women—to see the fight," he said. "Every man in the world will be crazy to see it—why not the women? I expect to see five thousand seats in the arena occupied by women. And why not?

"Even out at Goldfield when I managed the Gans-Nelson fight, there were forty baby carriages checked at the door," he concluded as earnestly as though he believed it himself.

As soon as the news that Tex had paid Jack and Jeff \$10,000 bonuses for signing with him, a New York surgeon, Dr. Cornelius G. Coakley, obtained a court order attaching that money. The surgeon, Dr. Coakley, in his bill of particulars, charged that Rickard had never paid his \$1,950 bill for the operation he had performed on the promoter's five-year-old daughter, Bessie, shortly before she died, on August 5, 1907. Rickard told newspapermen that it was true he had not paid the bill. He explained this was because he attributed the child's death to improper hospital care.

This started a rumor that Tex was broke. "That's ridiculous," Rickard said. "Why, I made \$250,000 out of some mining stock I sold just within the past few months. And I can raise as much more by selling the other stock I have in Nevada." When the reporter interviewing him looked dubious, Tex said, in his confusion, "If anyone can prove I'm broke, I will make him a present of a big sum of money."

On another occasion, Joe Humphreys heard Rickard swearing to a newspaperman that he could have raised twice the guarantee money out of his own personal funds. Humphreys warned him that such big talk could cost him a fortune.

"What fortune are you talking about, pardner?" he whispered to Joe. "I have no money. I'm just an old ex-cowpuncher, but I got good backing."

Tex, the otherwise honest Texan, had learned, even that early, one of the fundamental tricks of successful fight promoting—talking out of both sides of his mouth practically at the same moment.

This had a curious effect on his involuntary speech, as it has had

on Casey Stengel's. Like the almost godlike manager of the New York Yankees, Tex could talk grammatically whenever he thought it necessary and wasn't too excited. But also like Casey, he did not often feel that straight talking best served his purposes. Producing unmangled English, for that matter, required a special effort on Tex's part which he didn't care to make unless convinced it was worth the trouble. And in the fight business he was learning, perfect syntax only aroused suspicion, anyway.

## The double switcheroo

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, Tex Rickard made his share of business mistakes. But the most costly error of his career was letting Jack Gleason talk him into staging the Johnson-Jeffries fight in San Francisco.

Tex had objected to San Francisco because of the trouble he knew Graney and Coffroth were in a position to make for him there. Tuxedo Eddie was boiling with rage because he had been outbid, and Sunny Jim was also in a vengeful mood.

But Jack Gleason argued that he and his friends could easily block any hostile moves they might attempt. He convinced Tex that Governor James N. Gillett had promised him personally that the fight would go on as scheduled, no matter who objected.

Meanwhile, both public interest and the reformers' opposition to the fight seemed to be growing with equal speed. By 1910 the reformers had managed to get prize fighting banned in every Western state except California and Nevada. Special legislation would have been required to put on the fight in Utah. And in California (though the fact had long been ignored) the law permitted only "sparring exhibitions."

For years the reformers had been helped everywhere in their up-

lift work by the numerous fakes and fixes arranged by promoters and managers. And now, in no time at all, the story spread around the country that the fix also was in on this one.

Johnson was said to have agreed to lay down to Jeffries because Jeff refused to fight him on the level. The smart-money boys said that years of easy living had inflated the conscripted rescuer of the white race to 100 pounds over his natural fighting weight of 220. Despite everything he was doing, the rumor went, Jeff was finding it impossible to reduce without weakening himself terribly. Going the rounds was a second, and far fouler, story that Jeff had contracted syphilis and was a mere hollow shell of himself. It should have been unnecessary to point out, of course, that at 320 pounds Jeffries would have been the heaviest hollow shell in the history of the human body.

But the first story was true. From the beginning, the odds which heavily favored Jeffries indicated how many professional gamblers were in on the arrangement. These one-sided odds also reflected the faith of countless fight fans in Jeff's ability to come back and put the Negro in his place.

Though no man was ever prouder than Johnson of being world heavyweight champion, it is not too surprising that he was willing to throw this title bout. He knew that Jeff, after this fight, could never again be coaxed back into the ring. As the last previous titleholder, Jack could then claim the championship. If the public demanded an elimination contest, he felt certain he would win it with ease, having already beaten the best white heavyweights. The three Negroes who had a good chance against him would be barred. That was a lead-pipe cinch.

But win, lose, or draw, to Jack the most attractive feature of the Jeffries bout was the magnificent proportions of the purse. Jeff had wanted this to be split 75 per cent to the winner, 25 to the loser, but on getting the Negro's vow to quit, he had generously changed this to a sixty-forty deal.

Having no royal personages of their own to worship, Americans ever since the Revolutionary War have enshrined a fine assortment of unworthy heroes in their hearts. But this nation of free men has

seldom so miscast a man as a villain as in the case of Jack (L'il Arthur) Johnson.

It is evident now that his real crime was being born a little ahead of his time. If Johnson could have won his championship during the twenties, he would have been idolized by whites and blacks alike. He was gay, giddy, prodigal, reckless, irreverent, and nonchalant as Noel Coward himself. In fact, everything about Jack Johnson was perfectly geared to the flibbertigibbet spirit of the twenties. And he was still around in the twenties, and still making something of a noise.

In fact, it was in 1927, the year Jack approached fifty, that Damon Runyon wrote that he was still something of a physical marvel, though no longer "the lean-flanked, cat-footed jaguar" who had fought Jeffries and could take fellows larger than himself and set them around the ring like ninepins at his own peculiar pleasure, chatting jovially with the crowd as he did so. He had a knack of catching punches as an infielder catches a baseball. He reached out and grabbed most of them before they got well started.

"I always thought that John Arthur at his best would have been too much for Jack Dempsey," concluded Runyon. "He would have smothered up the rushes of the Manassa Mauler, it seems to me, and gradually cuffed him into submission."

These words appear in a preface to Johnson's autobiography *Jack Johnson—In the Ring—And Out!* which describes how he had won and lost the championship, lived through prison and exile, embraced such swanky side professions as bullfighting, acting, and driving racing cars. Also how Jack had roamed the world, owned a cabaret in Chicago that featured silver spittoons, and married four women, including three white girls, and squandered several oversized fortunes. Despite all that, he had engaged in his last prize fight only the year before, at forty-eight.

Jack was never one to stint himself in anything, and his life story had five prefaces, including Runyon's. In another flattering preface, Tad, the sports writer-cartoonist, calls Johnson the greatest heavyweight of all times. In the others, Ed W. Smith, a boxing writer and referee, attributes most of Jack's troubles to his "too-trusting faith in the white brethren," and J. B. Lewis applauds his

love of good music, books, and the fine arts. The last of the five prefaces was by Johnson's third white wife, Mrs. Irene Johnson. It described their romance, the thrill when he proposed to her instead of to her best girl friend, "the real, soul-stirring love" that had been theirs since their marriage.

Johnson's autobiography is as crowded with startling adventures and strange twists of destiny as the memoirs of Casanova, Jean Jacques Rousseau, or Ely Culbertson. He was born in Galveston, Texas, on March 31, 1878, the son of a religious-minded school janitor who was a clergyman on Sundays.

John Arthur Johnson embarked on his wanderings early. As a boy of twelve he was moved by the yearning to see Steve Brodie, who had become the most celebrated denizen on New York's Bowery on the strength of his claim to having jumped off Brooklyn Bridge when nobody was looking. However, the freight train Jack sneaked on went to Key West, Florida, where the youthful vagabond got a job as a sponge fisherman. While out alone in a sailboat, Jack and his small craft one day were attacked by a monster shark 23 feet long, but he managed to fight off this ravenous sea beast with his sponge nets.

After further mishaps Jack reached New York, made the acquaintance of Mr. Brodie, and also that of Chuck Conners, the "Mayor of the Bowery." Then he moved on to Boston. He found employment in a fashionable Back Bay stable, but a horse fell on him, breaking his leg. On recovering, Jack returned to Galveston, where he quickly established himself as a stevedore, a first-rate street fighter, and an accomplished craps shooter.

Like most autobiographers, Jack gave himself none of the worst of it in his life story. He also was blessed with an antic imagination. While in Australia, before fighting Tommy Burns, he claimed to have outraced a kangaroo who dropped dead of combined fatigue and humiliation. He also recalled having \$15,000 pressed upon him by bookmakers in Melbourne who thought that when he was waving greetings at the track to friends in the grandstand, he was signaling bets to them on a long shot named Istria. He also mentioned that King Edward VII became so indignant at Burns for ducking his challenges to ring combat that His Royal Majesty denounced his own Canadian subject as a "Yankee bluffer."

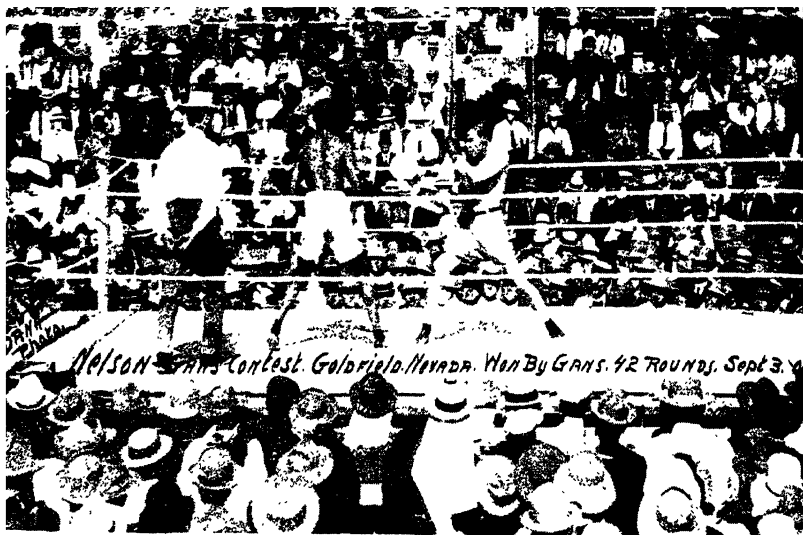




*A street in Dawson, the Klondike gold-rush town where Rickard and a partner lost \$155,000 in gold dust, also their gambling house, in what Tex later described as "just one of those nights."*

*George L. Rickard was a cowboy until he was 22. But he dressed in his Sunday best for this picture with two children of a friend in Wichita Falls, Texas.*





*The Joe Gans-Battling Nelson fight for the world lightweight championship was the first Tex promoted. It was staged to sell Goldfield's mining stocks. Tex's personal profit from the bout was \$13,000, but fans who bought stocks were less fortunate.*



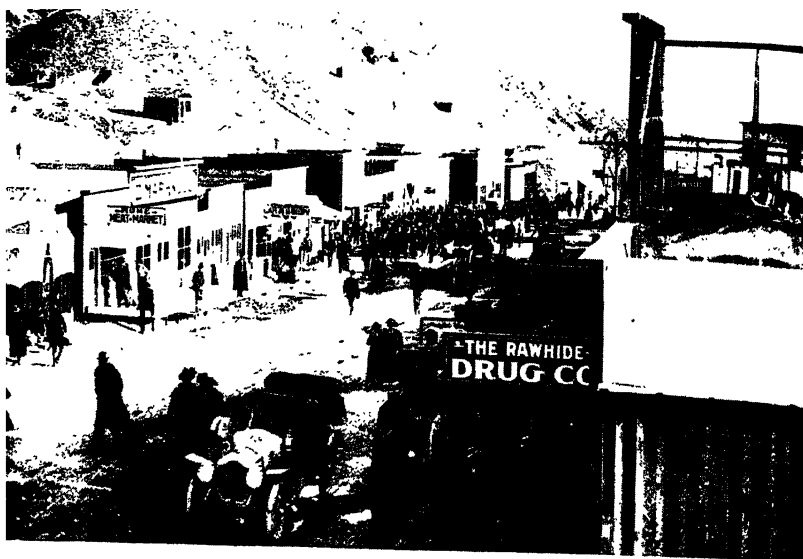
*Gentle Edith Mae, Rickard's second wife and his "perfect hostess" wherever his adventures took him: Nome, Goldfield, Reno, Toledo, New York, the jungles of Paraguay.*

*This photograph was taken in 1909, just after Rickard stunned the sports world by "stealing" the Johnson-Jeffries bout from the pros. The gentleman in the pajama-length coat is Jack Gleason, his co-promoter.*

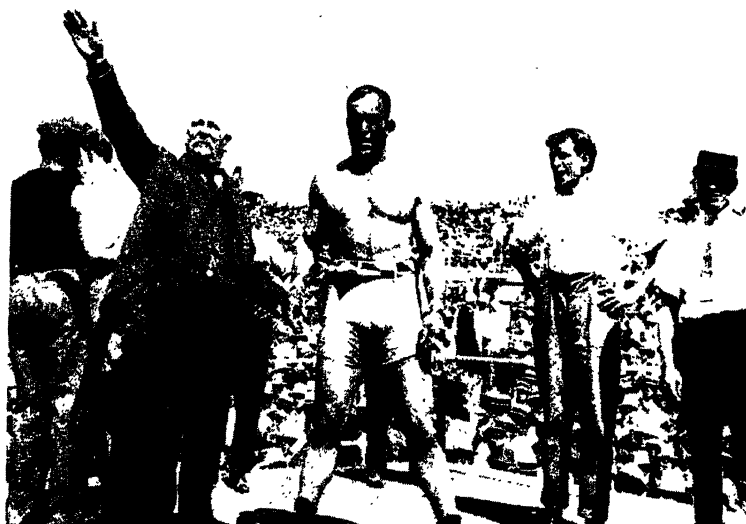


*Tex (left) confers with a cowboy foreman on his 5,000,000-acre ranch in Paraguay. Rickard's livestock-raising methods won the wholehearted praise of ex-President Theodore Roosevelt, who studied them while exploring the Gran Chaco.*





*Rawhide, Nevada, the gold boom-and-bust town which Rickard, in cahoots with George Graham Rice, the notorious swindler, kept briefly alive with eye-popping newspaper hoaxes.*



*World Heavyweight Champion Jack Johnson is supremely confident, the ex-champion, Jeffries (below, left) braces his once mighty muscles as announcer Jordan introduces them to the record-breaking crowd at Reno, on July 4, 1910. But the tip-off on the one-sided battle was Big Jeff's woebegone, hopeless face in the photograph of him getting into the ring. That's another great ex-champ, Gentleman Jim Corbett, holding out his hand to Jeff.*





*Jack Dempsey (with Doc Kearns) won the world heavyweight championship in 1919, but no awards as a fashion plate.*



*With Rickard as his guide, Georges Carpentier visits the arena at Boyle's Thirty Acres, Jersey City.*

*Tex's promotional masterpiece was the Dempsey-Carpentier fight in 1921 at Jersey City which drew the world's first "million-dollar gate." Here is part of the crowd of 77,328 (paid). Rickard made on this one bout over \$400,000, more than either of the fighters.*





*Before a \$2,658,000 Tex Rickard fight crowd Champion Tunney goes down at Chicago for "the long count." Estelle Taylor Dempsey, Jack Dempsey, holding the Rickard baby, Maxine Hodges Rickard, and Tex.*



*The Tex Rickard of whom it was written "luck gave him the cards and he knew how to play them."*





*Rickard's baby daughter Maxine was the ornament and the delight of his last few years. Incidentally, this is one of the very few photographs of the king of sports promoters that caught him smiling.*

*On a frostbitten winter day, George L. Rickard leaves Madison Square Garden for the last time. Ring champions wept like children before his casket and, as can be seen, thousands of New Yorkers jammed the streets, clung to fire escapes, and stood on rooftops to see the funeral procession.*





If these seem like odd adventures, Jack had much odder ones later on, including relentless persecution during his declining years by Lady Olga, the world's most famous bearded woman. Lady Olga, who reluctantly shared costarring honors with Jack at a Coney Island freak show, objected to Johnson because of his habit of drinking beer through a straw, which she considered vulgar. The bearded lady also charged that he was not a true freak and therefore had no right to exhibit himself as though he were a bona fide monstrosity, like herself, Zip What Is It? or Leo the Lion-Faced Boy.

Jeffries' ring record inspired the almost universal faith of white fans in his ability to defeat Johnson after being out of action so long. Jim had won the world title in 1899 from Bob Fitzsimmons in his twelfth professional fight. He had never been defeated. Again and again he had taken punishment from killing sluggers like Fitzsimmons, and, slashed to ribbons, had come on to win. To his admirers he seemed like some legendary strong man in the great fables who could endure any torture, any battering, lose quarts of blood without really being injured. Though clumsy in his first ring appearances, he later developed greater speed than Corbett.

Young or old, rusty or in good shape, his fans held him unbeatable, particularly by Jack Johnson, who the sports writers repeatedly said had a yellow streak. And though thirty-five in 1910, Jeff was only three years older than the man from Galveston.

Two years after *Jack Johnson—In the Ring—And Out!* was published, *Two-Fisted Jeff*, Jim's autobiography, appeared in the bookstores. It was ghost-written by Hugh S. Fullerton, one of the era's sports-page stars.

In his life story Jeffries, too, gave himself none the worst of it. Surprisingly, the incidents with a mythological flavor are more numerous than in the Johnson saga. Jeff was born in Carroll, Ohio, on April 15, 1875. His father was a sturdy Scotch-American farmer with the sort of fanned-out, cover-all beard that is seldom seen around since the House of David baseball team disbanded. His mother, who had seven other children, was of Pennsylvania Dutch stock.

When James J. was seven, his father, who he says was then

worth about \$70,000, moved his family to a 97-acre ranch within the city limits of Los Angeles. Jim remembered himself as a good-natured boy who had to shake his head many times, like a bull, when he wished to get angry enough to fight another boy.

At fourteen he had a quarrel with his schoolteacher that would have enchanted Terrible Terry McGovern and his dear old mother. This started one day during a noon-recess ball game. The teacher was pitching and Jim playing second base. Observing that Jim was letting his attention stray, the pitcher hit the lad in the behind with the ball, or, as Jeffries more delicately put it, "at the base of my spine."

A few weeks later Jim was pitching and observed that the teacher, this day playing third base, was neglecting his duties to talk to some friends. Whirling around, he threw the ball at him. It struck the teacher in the face, knocked him down, and sent his spectacles flying. Unable to find his glasses, and suffering both from a headache and an aching face, the teacher dismissed his pupils for the day. The incident, needless to say, made Jim the most popular boy in the school.

The teacher left Jim alone after that—until the day he saw young Jeffries slipping a note to a girl. He demanded the note from the girl. When she refused to give it to him, he hit her on the hand with his ruler. This so distressed the love-smitten Jeffries that he seized his slate and broke it over the teacher's head. The boy then knocked the teacher down, jumped on him, and was banging his head against the floor when he was pulled off the crushed educator by two of his brothers.

That ended Mr. Jeffries' formal schooling except for a brief spell at a business college. His first job was in a tin mine, where he delighted his fellow workers, who were mostly Cornishmen, by his wrestling ability and his speed as a barefooted sprinter. Some of his admirers claimed Jim could run the 100-yard dash in ten seconds flat, but Jeffries confessed to his ghost writer that their timing methods were a bit on the slipshod side. Jim next developed his mighty muscles as a boilermaker's helper in the shops of the Santa Fe Railroad at San Bernardino.

Though not in most record books, his first ring fight was at nineteen, with a clever Negro scrapper named Hank Griffin. Jim

often called this his most vicious fight. He said that Griffin that evening taught him more about boxing than he was able to learn during the rest of his life.

Griffin just kept relentlessly on, hooking and jabbing his head off. It was not until the fourteenth round that, as Jeff put it, he got his first real opening. Then, with a straight left-hand punch, he drove Griffin back 15 feet. Hank hit the ropes, and the wall behind them, with such force that he was hurled back through the air at the waiting Jeffries. While Griffin was still in mid-air, Jim rapped him with a hard right on the chin to discourage him from getting up again.

His mother saw newspaper accounts of her son's Bunyanesque victory. Examining his black-and-blue face, she asked:

"What would you look like if you had lost the fight?"

Though James J. had been paid \$400 for the fight, he hung his shaggy head in shame. When his mother asked him not to fight professionally again until he was twenty-one and had achieved his full strength, he promised. But meanwhile he kept in shape by boxing two or three times a week in a local gymnasium.

In his second fight two years later with Dan Long, in San Francisco where Long was highly regarded, Jeff knocked out his man in two rounds. Benny Benjamin, the sporting editor of the *Chronicle*, who saw the fight, predicted Jim would be the next heavyweight champion.

And Jeff became famous from coast to coast before his next bout. He went to Carson City, Nevada, and got a job as sparring partner for world heavyweight champion Jim Corbett, who was training for his bout with Bob Fitzsimmons.

One day Corbett barred newspapermen from his workout with Jeffries and tried to see if he could knock out the young iron man. This assault without warning so angered Jeff that he almost pushed the champion through the wall.

The reporters waiting outside, hearing the racket, wired their papers that the brawny young boilermaker had knocked out the champion in their secret workout. Neither the angry denials of Corbett nor the forthright statements of Jeffries that nothing like that had happened could kill off this romantic tale.

Except for one poor performance in New York against Bob

Armstrong, Jim's rise thereafter was meteoric. Fitzsimmons, who had won Corbett's title, heard about the Armstrong fight and gave Jim a shot at the title, thinking him an easy mark. But after eleven rounds of savage fighting Jeff won the title by knocking out the champion. His first defense of the title, a twenty-five-round bout with Sailor Tom Sharkey, has been called the most brutal, bruising battle in ring history. Later Jeff knocked out Fitzsimmons again, and the other ex-champion, Jim Corbett, twice. Yet Jeff honestly believed that he had never hit anyone with all his strength. He said this was because he did not want to kill his opponents.

Reading his autobiography, one is also struck by the number of strange ailments that afflicted the California Hercules during his ring career, not to mention the cures they required.

According to Jeff, he won his early fight against Long practically standing on one leg. Several days before, he had broken a bone in his other foot, which caused the foot and leg to swell up to twice normal size. Before his next fight he was felled by pneumonia. The attack was so extreme that Jeff's doctor ordered him to drink a full case of whisky every two days and prescribed powerful doses of a drug. "If an ordinary man took even one-third the dose of this drug you are taking regularly, James," said the physician, "he would die."

The fighter survived both the sickness and this dynamic medication, but the doctor told him he was finished as a pugilist. Jeff would not accept that opinion. Going to the woods, he fished, hunted, and exercised himself back into condition. When he returned, the doctor examined him, and said, "I still don't believe it. You are simply not human, Jeffries."

In the Bob Armstrong fight, Jeffries broke both hands. Though he bled copiously in other bouts, he does not mention suffering from anemia afterward, and one must conclude he had not heard of that malady.

At this late date it is difficult to prove whether or not Rickard knew that Johnson had agreed to throw the fight to Jeffries. Reporters kept asking him about the rumors and were told repeatedly that the battle was to be "the squarest anyone had ever seen."

Having the born showman's gift for believing what he wished to believe, it is likely that if any doubts nagged Tex he would have pushed them out of his mind. What he wanted more than anything else was to put on the greatest, most sensational and successful boxing show ever seen.

Boxing writers who talked to Tex every day in San Francisco got the impression that he knew nothing of the fix. Tad, among others, was sure of that. It was Tad, incidentally, who eventually got the inside story of Gleason's perfidy from Sunny Jim.

Coffroth said Gleason had told him that through his pal, Sam Berger, he had Jeffries' promise to fight for no one Gleason objected to.

"If you put up \$50,000, Jim," Jack said, "we'll let you in for half of the promotion."

Coffroth agreed, but after talking to Rickard in New York Gleason had come to Sunny Jim with a much better proposition. Rickard had agreed, he said, to put up all of the money and give them half of the profits from the bout. His only condition was that Coffroth stay out of the bidding.

"Naturally," said Gleason, "I'll divide my fifty per cent with you."

"As I trusted my pal as I would my own mother," Coffroth told Tad, "I shook hands with him on that. Right after the bids were opened, Gleason was supposed to telephone me at my hotel. I waited there all night. When the call didn't come, I tried to phone him at his hotel, but was unable to get in touch with him.

"Gleason knew I was sailing for Europe in a few days with films of the Johnson-Ketchell fight. I never heard a word from him."

If all this seems a bit on the naïve side it should be borne in mind that fight promoters, like poets, horse players, and beautiful women, live in a world where fantastic things keep happening so often that gullibility, bordering on faith in the impossible, is almost essential to survival.

And no one who has studied either the mind of a conniving Irishman or that of a fourth-rate Broadway playwright will wonder

why Gleason insisted on San Francisco as the site of the fight. The danger of someone upsetting Tex Rickard's apple cart was greatest there, but Jack Gleason thrived on suspense, conflict, and taking big chances with other people's money.

He possibly believed he could quiet down Sunny Jim with some fresh blarney if Coffroth opposed the fight. He certainly underestimated Graney's interest because Tuxedo Eddie had been out of the boxing game for three years previous to making his big bid for the Johnson-Jeffries bout. And Graney now was a very busy little man indeed. Besides his cabaret, he ran pool parlors and horse rooms, and had the exclusive contract with the city for shoeing the thousands of horses used by the San Francisco Police and Fire Departments. The rate was \$2.50 a shoe, or \$10 per horse.

Some years before, the city fathers had tried to break up Sunny Jim's fight trust with an ordinance stipulating that a different man each month be given the exclusive license to hold bouts in the city. Coffroth skirted this neatly by sending a different aide downtown each month to pick up the license for him, in the aide's name. Still working through these minions, Sunny Jim then sold the privilege of staging fights on various nights for whatever he could get.

During July, 1910, the license holder, technically speaking, was Firecracker Jim Griffin, a local referee, who charged Rickard and Gleason \$6,000 for use of the franchise on Independence Day. For his site Tex rented an empty lot at the corner of Market and Sixth Streets and made a deal with Tom O'Dea and James McLaughlin, local contractors, to build a \$35,000 arena there, seating 30,200.

One afternoon Tex went down to Sixth and Market to see how the work was progressing. He found a stranger loading two-by-fours on a truck. There was a cop there, but he appeared to be looking the other way.

When Rickard identified himself to the policeman and asked him to stop the thievery, the cop laughed in his face. "You're not Tex Rickard," he said. "Beat it, or I'll run you in." By the time Tex was able to make arrangements for his lumber to be guarded, a good deal of it had vanished.

The following week a local politician told Rickard, "I don't want a cent of graft, seeing that this fight is such a good thing for the city."

Tex looked at him deadpan, and waited.

"All I want is five hundred fifty-dollar tickets to sell to my friends. I don't want anything else at all. Not one thing."

"Have you got twenty-five thousand to pay for these tickets?" asked Tex.

The politician reacted as though Tex was demented. "Who said anything about paying for them?" he asked.

"Beat it," said Tex, speaking as rudely as the cop at the fight site. "You'll be lucky to get in yourself without a ticket."

With checks and money orders coming in from all over the country, and from the British Isles, Australia, France, even from India and China, Tex cavorted around, happy as a bridegroom. As at Goldfield, he received a goodly share of the publicity. Gleason occasionally was mentioned. But the reporters, having faith in Tex's word, usually quoted him on the latest developments. Sometimes, they sent him to heaven by calling him the "King of the Sport Promoters."

Being an incurable optimist, Tex was little disturbed by tales that Jeffries was doing almost no boxing, and that his trainers were quarreling with one another. Jeff's staff included—in addition to Sam Berger—Jim Corbett, Joe Choynski, Bob Armstrong, Farmer Burns, and Jeffries' brother Jack.

Daily, parties of Jeff's admirers would go up to Rowardennan, Jeff's camp high in the mountains, only to be told that Jim was not boxing that day. He was resting, or had hurt his thumb, or his sparring partners had pleaded for mercy.

Once, after watching Jeffries go through several rounds in which he did nothing but avoid his sparring partners' punches, Tex asked him why he didn't hit them.

"I'm afraid of killing them," Jeff told him. "My main job is getting accustomed to taking hard, smashing punches like I could years ago."

Rickard, never a good judge of boxing skill, left Rowardennan satisfied that his idol was in fine condition and spirits. He was glad that Jeff had the vaudeville headliners, Eddie Leonard, the

minstrel man, and Walter C. Kelly, the "Virginia Judge," at camp to amuse him nights with songs, dances, and funny sayings.

Rickard was more troubled at the goings-on at Johnson's camp than at Rowardennan. One day the newspapers reported Jack had broken California's speed laws and then sassed a couple of cops. Tex ordered Johnson's car locked up.

Jack was also quarreling with his white manager, George Little. "I discharge you, sir," he told Little one day after they fell out over a poker game. Little threatened to tie up the entire purse, until Tex arranged a settlement.

The stories written about Johnson's training at Seal Rock emphasized his love of laughter and irresponsibility far more than his daily sock-for-sock bouts with his sparring partners. The hours he spent running, skipping rope, and punching the bag were hardly mentioned.

Jack consistently provided more interesting and colorful copy. He clowning it up in style, played the bass viol with skill and gusto, and made a running gag of his love of chickens. Jack roared with amusement on reading a story that he was eating eight to a dozen large chickens every day.

"No stolen chicken," he joked, "ever passes the portals of my face. I'm always for chicken, but chickens are not always for me. Guess they see that gleam in my eye whenever I get near them. But chicken and corn fritters are affinities. They are meant for each other and both are meant for me."

The sports writers consistently misinterpreted his casualness and high spirits as evidences of irresponsibility rather than supreme confidence.

Tex hit the ceiling on reading an interview given out by Billy Nolan, his Goldfield gadfly, that Jack had asked him to become his manager.

"Nolan will never have anything to do with a fighter in a bout I'm promoting," he told Johnson. "That bum made enough trouble for me in Nevada."

"Okay, Mr. Tex," said Jack with a grin. "I'll tell everybody your order is that Mr. Nolan gets thrown out on his ear if he comes around here again."

A ruckus blew up over the selection of a referee. For a time it threatened to outdo the similar Donnybrook at Goldfield. In



1910, the most respected referees were Eddie Graney, George Siler, and Charlie White, a New Yorker. Along with a dozen other officials of good repute, each was considered and rejected by one fighter or the other.

Though the fix was in, both men were suspicious because of the large volume of betting on the fight all over the country. In the largest wager reported, Clarence Berry, of Los Angeles, bet \$50,000 on Jeffries against \$35,000 on Johnson put up by Fred Meyerstein of San Francisco.

The controversy ended when Jack Johnson suggested that Tex Rickard referee. Jeffries said no one he could think of would suit him better.

"The most suspicious bunch of men that ever got together were involved," wrote Tad of this. "Every day the talk was of a fake, frameup, double-cross. No matter where you went you were bound to hear some of that crooked chatter. There was too much money bet. The man selected had to be purer than the driven snow. Picking the right man seemed impossible until they agreed on Rickard."

It was from Tad, incidentally, that the first hint came that Tex's doubts about holding the fight in San Francisco were about to be justified. In the San Francisco *Examiner*, on June 15, he wrote, "There is a wild rumor that Governor Gillett has wired District Attorney Fickert to stop the fight. But the latter laughs at the idea."

The prosecutor stopped laughing the next day when Gillett confirmed the "wild rumor," and criticized Fickert for not carrying out his orders.

Tex at first could not believe this. As soon as he got a chance to think things over he said he would sue Governor Gillett personally for the monies he had already expended on the fight. But he hastily withdrew his threat when Gillett replied:

"If Tex Rickard is looking for a fight with me he will get a bigger one than he has advertised for the Fourth of July. We've had enough of prize fights and prize fight promoters. They've been breaking the law long enough and we'll have no more of it. When the fighters lick the State of California they can go ahead and lick each other, but not before."

The great fixer, Gleason, had no suggestions of what to do.

"The hell with Gillett and California too," said Tex.

Three offers had just come to him from Reno, Goldfield, and Ely, his home town in Nevada. The one from Goldfield read:

CITY OF GOLDFIELD GUARANTEES SALE OF SIX  
THOUSAND SEATS AT TWENTY DOLLARS EACH  
IF FIGHT TAKES PLACE HERE. HAS THREE  
RAILROADS IN BACK OF HER. COME BACK TO  
YOUR FIRST LOVE. ANSWER IMMEDIATELY.

A larger offer from Toronto, Canada, quickly proved to be a hoax. Nothing was heard from Salt Lake City.

"After what just happened here," said Tex, "I wouldn't dare approach those Salt Lake City fellows again." With \$133,000 of ticket orders in, and between \$30,000 and \$50,000 invested in the stadium, the license, and other expenses, Tex kept hoping desperately that somehow or other the Governor could be talked into changing his mind. The blow had come without warning and San Francisco's hotel and business men were up in arms. They had counted on making a fortune catering to the army of out-of-town fans.

A last-minute miracle seemed possible when Mayor P. H. McCarthy, who was vacationing in the Middle West, was heard from. McCarthy had been elected on his pledge to make San Francisco "the Paris of America." In Chicago, he thundered to reporters:

"I am running San Francisco. I am taking no orders from Gillett or his attorney general. You can bet your last dollar that the fight will be pulled off in my town, as advertised." But on getting home, Mayor McCarthy, after a tense conference with Governor Gillett, said he had been misquoted.

Louis Blot, a local boxing promoter, was probably the San Franciscan most incensed over the Governor's ruling. Blot had expected to cash in on the big show by staging a bout between Sam Langford and Al Kaufman the night before.

When the Governor sent word to Blot that his fight had to be canceled, the promoter challenged him to stop it. Gillett had his attorney general, U. S. Webb, call out six companies of the state militia, and marched them into Blot's arena. The soldiers bivouacked there until Blot gave up.

You can still start an argument in San Francisco by asking old reporters who wrecked Rickard's plan to hold the fight there.

"The story I always got," says Scoop Gleeson, who was writing sports at the time on the *Bulletin*, "was that Graney went to the Governor, and complained that he hadn't been taken care of. But others say that it was Firecracker Jim Griffin who spilled the beans, and tipped off Gillett that the fight was fixed."

Other newspapermen think it possible that Alex Greggains, another local referee, had a hand in the dirty work out of resentment at not being chosen to officiate in the big bout.

Tex himself always blamed Coffroth, asserting that even if Graney or someone else did the hatchet work, Sunny Jim could have stopped him.

It is true that local fight men may have urged Gillett to ban the mixed bout. But the deciding factor was the enormous pressure reformers had been exerting on the Governor. All through June they bombarded him with thousands of letters, telephone calls, and telegrams. One morning Gillett came to his office to find fifty club women waiting for him. Most of them got down on their knees when they saw him, and begged him to ban the fight. Their leaders told Gillett that all the women—along with thousands of other California club women—would do everything in their power to wreck his career if he refused to stop the fight. They opposed it, they said, both as a brutal spectacle and because it pitted a Negro against a white man.

Though Governor Gillett realized banning the fight meant bringing down on his head the wrath of San Francisco's businessmen, the sporting fraternity, and certain newspapers, the reformers represented a far larger number of voters.

The pulpits of the city and state throbbed that Sunday with eulogies of his action. California's most eminent stuffed shirts, including David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University, also applauded his brave stand along with such important women's clubs as The Grand Parlor of the Native Daughters of the Golden West.

Up at Rowardennan Jim Jeffries went berserk on hearing the news. The big fellow pounded his head against the wall and sobbed out his anguish for hours. The reason was that Jeff had

received along with the news a polite message from Jack Johnson. This informed Jeff that as the fight would have to be fought somewhere else than in California, he no longer felt bound by his promise to lay down.

In San Francisco, after weighing the three Nevada offers, Tex announced he would prefer Reno to the other two towns because of its superior railroad facilities. This brought such protests from Ely and Goldfield that he agreed to suspend his final decision until he could weigh the propositions of delegations from each town.

Tex was baffled when Jeff objected violently to a switch to another state. The big fellow pointed out that the final articles required him to meet Johnson only in California. Rickard declared that if Jeff withdrew it would mean the loss of a fortune to the fight's backers and "my personal ruin."

Jeff in the end was persuaded. To Tex he confessed that the chief reason that he was reluctant to fight in Nevada was that five years before he had welshed on \$25,000 in IOU's to gamblers in Reno.

Being an old gambler, Tex couldn't have been more deeply shocked if his idol had admitted he had just killed Mrs. Jeffries and eaten her leg for lunch.

"Well," he gasped, after a moment or two, "I'll have to see the boys. We'll try to square it, Jim, somehow."

The gamblers to whom Jeff had lost the IOU's packed enough political influence in Nevada to have stopped the fight. But later, when Tex brought up the matter, they told him they would never interfere with one of his promotions, seeing that he had been a gambler like themselves, and as square a one as ever lived, at that. What they thought of James J. Jeffries, the great hope of the white race, was unprintable. However, Tex was able to talk them into accepting payment from Jeff on a 50-cents-on-the-dollar basis.

On getting Jeffries' promise to fight Johnson in Nevada, Tex left for Reno to meet with the leading citizens of the three desert towns.

The San Francisco *Examiner*, in contrasting his quiet departure with the cheering crowds that greeted him on his arrival there a

few weeks before, gravely described him as "The Napoleon of Promoters who has taken the hardest blow since boxing gloves were invented."

Bob Edgren, who accompanied Tex to Reno, wrote: "In the lobbies of the great hotels groups gathered and talked in low tones. There was the earthquake feeling of calamity in the air. Tex Rickard was the one cheerful man in sight as we slipped on the ferry. I can't help admiring Rickard's magnificent nerve. He was actually smiling as he looked back at the silent city on the hills. Waving his hand, he said, 'Well, I'm leaving \$250,000 in cash behind, and at least a couple of hundred thousand more, and I'm blamed glad to get away from here with my hide.'"

At every station in Nevada, there were old friends from Goldfield, Ely, and the other mining towns who got aboard and joined the party. Tex felt both sentimental and apologetic.

"Boys," he said once, in a choking voice, "do you want me back home after I've been knocking around everywhere else?"

"Do we, Tex?" the old desert rats and prospectors exclaimed. "You bet your life we do."

"Well," said Tex, shaking his head, "I wish I'd come back here to Nevada the moment I got the fight. I ought to have known better than to fool around anywheres else."

Of the 42,000 persons living in Nevada in 1910, most of them seemed to have jammed themselves around the Reno railroad station to welcome Tex. Each of the three delegations had a brass band. When Tex disappeared into the Golden Hotel with the leaders of the three groups, the mob that had followed him waited on the street. The bands played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." When word came that Tex was about to emerge and announce his decision, Ole Elliott, in town with the Goldfield bunch, told the sunburned men around him:

"All right, boys! In two minutes get ready to cheer like hell."

But Tex, after waiting for quiet, said, "Boys, it's gotta be Reno because more railroads junction here."

His old partner was the first to grip his hand. "We're for you, Tex," Ole told him. "We're sorry to lose the big fight, and we hope you have chosen wisely. But we'll be here for your big mill!"

Among other inducements, Reno offered to build a 20,000-seat stadium for him. With a little over two weeks to work on it Jim O'Laughlin finished the arena the evening before the fight. O'Laughlin later regretted taking on the job. Though he built dozens of lovely churches, Mr. O'Laughlin was introduced to strangers until the day he died as the man who built the Johnson-Jeffries fight arena.

It was at this forty-five-round fight, by the way, that newspapermen and special writers began to have the curious misadventures that became regular side features of Tex Rickard's title bouts later on. At Reno, it was Jack London, covering the event for the New York *Herald*, whose mishaps became the talk of the town.

These began while on his way there from the East. He had proceeded to Ogden, Utah, where he had a half-hour wait for the train to Reno. Seeing a saloon across the street from the railroad station, he walked in. As a hangover from the years he had been a young hobo, London traveled light. "In other words," says a contemporary, "if Jack hauled a toothbrush around with him he kept it in his pocket. At no time did he burden himself with luggage."

But on this trip Jack London had picked up for research purposes a few paper-bound biographies of Johnson, Jeffries, and other ring champions.

The bartender in the saloon scrutinized London carefully as he ordered a shot of whisky. Jack, whose photograph had been widely published, was accustomed to arousing strangers' interest wherever he went, and paid no attention.

It was a tough joint. Both the sawdust on the floor and the customers along the bar looked as though they had been there for a long time. On deciding to visit the "Men's" Jack took his research material along with him to prevent its being stolen. Followed by all eyes, he walked through a little 2-foot-long swinging door. The urinal proved to be attached to the wall, and only a foot or so inside the door. With one hand engaged, and his paper books safely under his arm, the great author stood before it, pensively reading the roundelays, sonnets, and philosophical sayings scribbled on the wall by the other literary men who had used these same facilities.

While he was thus musing, a huge and hairy hand reached in and clawed at his eyes. Before Mr. London had finished his mission at the urinal he was pulled into the barroom. In the ensuing ten minutes he found himself in a gouging, punching, and kicking contest with the bartender. The bleary-eyed customers meanwhile settled themselves into chairs to watch the battle in comfort.

For ten minutes the best rough-and-tumble fighter ever on the roster of the Authors League and the bartender battled one another. Then both, suffering complete exhaustion simultaneously, stopped fighting.

On getting his breath, London picked up the biographical studies of Jeffries, Johnson, and the other champions. Then he turned to the bruised and bug-eyed bartender who had attacked him, and asked, "Now, in the name of Christ, would you please tell me what the hell we were fighting about?"

The panting bartender pointed indignantly to the paper books.

"You ain't got no right," he said, "to put up them clap ads in my toilet."

"What clap ads?" demanded London in amazement. He knew that the proper word was gonorrhea, but in deference to the lowness of the company used the word they understood.

"Them!" yelled the bartender, pointing again at the books. "If they ain't clap ads, what *are* they?"

Jack showed one of the books to the bartender. Its title was *Jim Jeffries, from Boiler Maker to World Heavyweight Champion*, and a picture of Jeff in fighting pose was on the cover.

The bartender flipped through a few pages. Then he asked, "When you finish reading this, stranger, could I have it? It sure looks interestin'."

Reno was full of cowpunchers, pickpockets, millionaires, and other characters great and small. But London made a sensation when he arrived by appearing in a crowded restaurant flanked by two rod-riding hobos, Watertank Willie and Seattle Sam. They looked alike except that Willie had three teeth, Sam only two. London himself looked as though he had been through a large and efficient meat grinder.

Frank O'Connell, an editor of the New York *Herald*, had gone to the station to meet the great man. Not seeing him when the train came in, O'Connell returned to the restaurant, where

London found him. Though shocked by Jack's lumps and bruises as well as the company he was keeping, O'Connell asked, "How did I miss you at the depot?"

"Got off the wrong side of the train, I'm afraid, out of habit," said London. "Glad I did. Might have missed my old friends here if I hadn't."

And he presented Watertank Willie and Seattle Sam to O'Connell. The *Herald* editor was puzzled about what to do next because two heiresses, young New York matrons, in Nevada for their divorces, were nudging him. On hearing that he was expecting the author, they had got O'Connell to promise to introduce them. When he did this, one of the divorcées-to-be exclaimed, "Are you really Jack London, the world's most famous author?"

Graciously acknowledging the compliment, London bowed from the waist, and presented Watertank Willie and Seattle Sam, saying, "I want you to meet my friends."

They all sat down at the table together. As London ate, the divorcées asked him many questions about his works. They tried to ignore Watertank Willie and Seattle Sam, who had ordered cantaloupe as an appetizer. Spurning the silverware before them, each was lifting his slice of ripe melon in both hands and pushing it into his face.

Reno boiled and bubbled with excitement as never before or since. You could not get into a restaurant, or find sleeping accommodations in a rain barrel, as the day for the fight approached. The railroads were doing a land-office business; so were the whore houses. Nobody had ever seen more pickpockets in one place at one time. The state police arrested so many of them that the Reno jail was bulging.

The talk of double-crosses, fakes, and fixes had increased since the shift from San Francisco. While Corbett, William Muldoon, Mike Murphy (the latter two famous trainers), and other experts were picking him to win easily, Jeff was acting like a man who considered July Fourth the Day of Doom.

On coming into town on June 23, Jeff had run like a terrified rabbit from the big mob waiting for him at the station. "I don't like crowds," he said. As he had at Rowardennan, Jeff refused



to box for the newspapermen. His new training quarters were at Moana Springs, two miles south of town. His aides each day promised the press that he would box a few rounds with his sparring partners, but Jeff always balked at the last moment.

"I like fighting in the ring," was again his only explanation, "but I hate sparring."

Meanwhile, inspired by the victory of their sisters in California, the women's clubs and other reform groups were showering the office of Governor Denver S. Dickerson with pleas to stop the fight. Stories that he would be forced to yield at the last moment to public opinion became so persistent that the Governor a few days before the fight dropped into Rickard's office to deny them.

"I just want to tell you that all the kickers in America don't pull a pound with me," the Governor told reporters. "They can knock as much as they please. Nevada state law provides for the licensing of fights, and you have complied with the requirements of the law. I have nothing to say about the fight. It's out of my hands." He turned to Rickard. "The only thing I want is to have you tell me, man to man, that it's on the level. I know you, Tex, and your word is good with me."

"It will be the squarest fight ever pulled off," Rickard promised.

Tex arranged for the Governor to go out to the two training camps and see for himself what splendid fighting condition the men were in. Though Jeff looked as strong as ever, he refused to box for the state head man. After talking briefly with Dickerson, he walked into his bedroom and took a nap.

But Johnson put on a great boxing exhibition at his camp, Rick's Resort. "I hope," he told the Governor, "that Mr. Jeffries is in as good shape as he looks. This is no grudge fight, sir, just a straight business proposition. If I can beat him, I'll make a fortune in the next couple of years. And if he beats me, I'll take my hat off to him."

Having no professionals helping him, Tex's biggest business problem was exchanging the San Francisco tickets for pasteboards good in Reno, and returning the money of fans who had canceled plans to attend.

During the week before the fight, Jack Gleason made an attempt to get back into the spotlight by announcing that he had

invited former President Theodore Roosevelt to see the bout as his personal guest. He got only howls of disdain from the sports writers.

"I have met the President," Gleason insisted, "and he was very nice to me. I merely wish to reciprocate his kindness." Though the heartless sports writers laughed even harder at this explanation, they included Gleason's invitation to Teddy in the stories they wired to their papers that day.

Tex's natural gift for showmanship flowered in full luxuriance for the first time at Reno. He put so much frosting on the cake that, apart from the bout itself, most fans recalled the occasion as one of the great events of their lives. One effective Rickard stunt was inviting great fighting champions and ex-champions to the bout as his guests, with all expenses paid.

Rickard never lost an opportunity to exploit his pet idea. "A large number of boxes are being constructed for women only in the area," one of his extraordinary announcements explained. "Each box is to be curtained off from public view, and each is to have its own private entrance. Any society bud possessing a big brother willing to separate himself from the price of a good seat can see the fight."

One day Tex had to deny that John L. Sullivan, the beloved Boston Strong Boy and last of the old heavyweight bare-knuckle champions, would be barred from the fight. John L., who once said he would enjoy reading the dictionary far more if it didn't change the subject so often, was in town to cover the great battle for the *New York Times*.

In one article published under his name the bluff, honest-speaking John L. wrote that it looked like a frame-up, with Jeff winning only because Johnson would quit to him.

"That big stiff better not come here or I'll turn the hose on him," roared Jim on reading this. "I never did like a knocker, and that fellow has knocked me for months without a reason in the world."

When Sullivan next appeared at Jeff's camp he was turned away by Corbett, his one-time conqueror. Stanley Ketchell and other outstanding fighters had also been barred from the camp after Jeffries learned they also were criticizing his failure to box more.

But the great John L. was not accustomed to being handled that way and for a few moments it looked as though Corbett and the Boston Strong Man would battle it out for a second time right there at the Moana Springs gate.

But Rickard prevailed upon Jeffries, Corbett, and Sullivan to stage a reconciliation scene for the press. On his return visit to Moana Springs John L. found Jeffries being rubbed down by six trainers. Sullivan tickled the bottom of one of his feet, and Jim sat up. He smiled on seeing the old bare-knuckle champ.

"Howdy, John," he said, and stretched out on the table again.

Everybody was welcome at Johnson's place except Sam Langford.

Almost every day Langford managed to see Johnson. Usually the conversation proceeded something like this:

"Why don't you fight me, champ?"

"Go 'way, man," Johnson would say. "I can't get nothin' fightin' you."

"You can get a damn good licking," Langford invariably replied, sometimes adding spitefully, "I hope Jeffries breaks your jaw."

As Independence Day approached, most of the experts were still picking Jeffries. The ghost writer who wrote Gentleman Jim's daily lies about Jeff's condition showed what he personally thought would happen in the Reno ring. He bet \$300 on Johnson at cockeyed odds: wagering \$100, at twenty to one, on Jack's winning in five rounds; the second \$100, at twelve to one, on his winning in ten rounds; and the last \$100, at eight to one, that the Negro would knock out Jeffries in fifteen.

Rex Beach, who picked Jeff, seemed to confuse him with an armadillo. He said the Californian's ribs came down so low on his body that they almost touched his hip bones, which sheathed his vital organs "within a cage of bone." Bob Edgren's reason for liking Jim's chances reflected what millions of white men felt and believed. "I pick Jeffries," he wrote, "because after watching the caveman's work for a month, I can't picture that huge bulk lying on the floor. He has never been beaten down to his knees, and Jeffries today looks as good to me as he did before any of his heroic battles.

"On the other hand, I can picture Johnson, dazed and bewildered. The difference is a difference in both breeding and education. Jeffries realizes his responsibility all of the time. When Johnson steps into the ring with him his bubbling confidence will bubble away."

The 20,000-seat arena was three-quarters full when, at long last, the huge white man and Johnson stood face to face in the center of the ring and listened to referee Tex Rickard's instructions.

The greatest fight of all time turned out to be a farce. At ring time \$25,000 in Jeffries money was being offered in Reno at as much as two and a half to one—with few takers. But the odds at the arena quickly shifted to even money soon after the fight began. It started tamely and monotonously, and continued that way for a dozen rounds, with the mighty Jeffries muscle-bound and helpless before the flashing fists of Johnson. He seemed like a big baby, at times, in the cruel hands of the Negro whose black skin gleamed in the bright Nevada sunshine.

Jim Corbett, before the fight, had confided a plan to Jeffries that he thought might help Jim. He would stand near one of the neutral corners, make faces at Johnson, and distract him with sarcastic comments. But the Jeffries camp couldn't even win out in the dialogue department. Johnson's ad libs outclassed Corbett's as much as his fighting outstripped the old boilermaker's pathetic efforts.

By the sixth everyone there who could shut prejudice out of his mind knew how the battle must and would end. For that was the round in which Johnson, who had been playing his cat-and-mouse game with Jeffries until then, all but closed Jim's right eye with two fast straight lefts. "Stop lovin' me, Mr. Jeff," the Negro shouted exultantly each time Jeffries tried to clinch with him.

Every round after that was a grueling three minutes of savage, unceasing punishment for Jeffries. And while outboxing and out-fighting him, Johnson's wisecracks and great golden smile made Jim Corbett's long face grow longer.

Those who still hoped for a miracle got their only thrill in the eleventh when Jeffries rushed in and got in a left and a right to

the body. But the blows looked better than they were. Johnson was moving away when they landed. After that, the only question was how long Jeff could last.

Among the best accounts of the finish was the New York *Evening World's* blow-by-blow description of the fifteenth round. It read:

When the men faced each other it was plain to all that Jeffries was in distress. His face was puffed and bleeding from the punishing lefts and rights he had received and his movements were languid. He shambled after the elusive Negro, sometimes crouching low with his left hand stuck out in front and sometimes standing erect. Stooping or erect, he was a mark for Johnson's accurately driven blows. Johnson simply waited for the big white man to come in and chopped his face to pieces. They came into a clinch after a feeble attempt by Jeffries to land a left-hand blow to the body. And as they broke away Johnson shot his left and right to the jaw in a flash. Jeffries staggered back against the ropes. His defensive power seemed to desert him in an instant. Johnson dashed at him like a tiger. A rain of lefts and rights delivered at close quarters sent Jeffries reeling blindly. Another series of short, snappy punches, and the big white giant went down. . . . He fell under the top rope, over the lower one, and on to the overhang of the platform. Resting on his haunches and right elbow, Jeffries looked around in a dazed way, and got up at the count of nine. While he was down Johnson stood almost over him until Rickard waved him back. He stood ready to strike, and when Jeffries arose from his knees he dashed in again. Jeffries reeled about, and tried to clinch but Johnson eluded him, and as the old champion swung around to the south end of the ring he jolted him twice on the jaw. Jeffries sank to his knees, weak and tired, but he got up again at the count of nine. It was then that Jeffries' friends began to call to Rickard to stop the fight.

"Stop it! Stop it!" they shouted from all sides. "Don't let him be knocked out." Rickard gave no heed to these appeals. Jeffries was helpless now, and as he staggered to his feet the Negro was waiting for him. A left, a right and another left, short, snappy, powerful blows, found their mark

on Jeffries' chin and he went down for the third time. Again he sprawled over the lower rope, hanging half outside the ring. The time-keeper raised and lowered his arms, tolling off the seconds. He had reached the count of seven when some of Jeffries' seconds put foot inside the ropes and Rickard walked between the fallen man and the Negro champion. Placing his hand on Johnson's shoulder, he declared him the winner.

While Jeffries was not counted out this was merely a technical evasion. It was evident that he could never have got up inside ten seconds.

The best lead on any of the hundreds of fight accounts sent out to the wide, wide world from the Reno ringside rows was Portus Baxter's in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. It read:

"THE BLACK WINS!"

# 11

## Shake hands with Madison Square Garden

YES, the black won, and the fight was another record-smashing money-maker. A total of 15,760 cash customers paid \$270,775 to see it. Most of the rest of the 20,000 seats had been filled by deadheads, 670 of whom got in on complimentary tickets and an estimated 2,500 more by climbing over the fences or sneaking in through the gates.

Though the gross fell short by almost 50 per cent of the half-million gate Tex had hoped to attract to his 30,200-seat bowl in San Francisco, that appeared due only to the last-minute shift. Thousands of fans either had not fancied the idea of traveling through the desert in July, or feared the fight would be stopped a second time by pressure from the reformers. Other thousands of fans in the San Francisco area had counted on buying cheaper seats but couldn't afford the train trip.

The \$270,775 gate was a box-office blockbuster just the same. That year the gross receipts of the five-game World Series amounted to \$174,000.

There had been plenty of side loot for both fighters. The *New York Evening World*, for example, added it up this way:

JOHNSON'S SHARE		JEFFRIES' SHARE	
Sixty per cent of purse	\$ 60,600	Forty per cent of purse	\$ 40,400
Bonus	10,000	Bonus	10,000
Share of moving pictures	50,000	Share of moving pictures	66,666
Total	\$120,600	Total	\$117,066
Earned after signing articles and before fight	25,000	Earned after signing articles and before fight	75,000
Total	\$145,000	Total	\$192,066

Johnson got a smaller share of the movie money because he had been in the middle of a backstage crap game in a Philadelphia theater when William (Pop) Rock, representing the General Film Company, called to dicker with him.

"He was so interested in that game," said Mr. Rock later, "that he didn't even ask what Jeff was getting."

Between them, Rickard and Gleason split a profit of \$120,000, after paying all expenses including their big losses at San Francisco. They also owned one-third of the film rights, though these subsequently turned out to be of no value.

The black won, yes, and almost everyone involved made a lot of money, but the fight turned out to be a national calamity. All over the country white people—men, women, and children—wept openly on the streets on hearing that Jeff was beaten. In dozens of towns and cities other white men went berserk. They shot and stabbed and beat up their Negro neighbors. In some towns the Negroes started the trouble. Before the race riots were over at least eleven were dead and scores were in hospitals with fractured skulls, gouged-out eyes, and other serious injuries.

Most of the riots, oddly enough, took place in the North. The morning after the fight the New York *Herald* declared that there had been more rioting in New York City alone than in almost all the rest of the country combined.

Jack Johnson knew nothing of the race riots until the next day. In his statement after the fight he had praised the high sportsman-



ship of the predominantly white fight crowd. But on his way home to Chicago his so-called Victory Train stopped several times, and he got the first hint of what the world thought of his defeat of Jeff. At Ogden, Utah, three tough-looking white men tried to force their way into his private car. Their leader was routed when one of the champion's trainers kicked him in the stomach and simultaneously spit a stream of tobacco juice into his eyes.

The race riots were followed by a tidal wave of retaliation. Congress, so dilatory about most legislation, quickly rushed through a bill barring films of prize fights from interstate commerce, under the mistaken impression that Johnson had retained a percentage of the movie rights. (The big loser was the all-white General Film Company which wound up with a deficit of \$200,-000 on the project.)

Reports that Jeff had lost only because he was doped the night before the fight were accepted as true by millions of white persons. They preferred believing this to the sportsmanlike statement Jeffries himself gave out on the train from Reno.

"I could never have whipped Jack Johnson at my best," Jeff said. "I could not have hit him. No, I could not have reached him in a thousand years."

But the next day, his brother Jack told reporters that Jim had been drugged, though he couldn't figure out just how the dirty work had been done. On overhearing this, Jim snapped that he had been completely surrounded at his training camp by loyal men.

To the newspapermen he added, "I simply couldn't fight. I am the only one to be blamed for losing that fight. When thousands of people came to me and told me I could redeem the white race, I was foolish enough to believe them. I honestly believed I could do it, but I was wrong."

Gentleman Jim Corbett refused to confirm the dope story and was accused by Bob Edgren of "deserting Jeffries in his final hour of darkness." The charge so burned up Corbett that he spilled the beans. He said Jeffries had been scared out of his wits before the fight. Jeff's personal physician, Gentleman Jim declared, had told Jim's training staff that morning that Jeff was suffering from an

attack of nervous prostration. Mrs. Jeffries, he added, had confided to him that Jim had sat up at the window all night before the battle "shivering in his nightie."

Tex Rickard offered the explanation that Jeffries had not trained seriously because he had been assured by a false friend that Johnson would "lay down," and had learned the truth only a few hours before ring time. Tex's theory was that the shock of learning that Johnson intended to do his best had utterly unnerved Jeff, who became "a changed man from that minute on."

The most fascinating thing about the long-lived "dope" story was that in the end Jeffries came to believe it himself. In his autobiography, the ex-boilermaker states that the drug slipped to him had remained in his system, benumbing his faculties, for seventeen years.

Tex was high in the chips after the fight. He told reporters that his copper stocks had kept rising in value and that his interest in The Northern, the hotel in Ely, Nevada, alone paid him \$1,100 a month. But the money from the hotel he seemed to regard as chicken feed.

Despite his sensational success with his first two boxing shows, Tex continued to think of himself primarily as a cattleman. Loving fights and crowds the way he did, he possibly also felt that it was unreasonable to expect to make a living out of anything which was so much fun.

That year he went back to Texas to buy a ranch but decided that land prices there were too high. Toward the end of 1910 he told newspapermen in New York, "I am going to South America, and back to my first love, ranching." With Edith Mae he sailed for Buenos Aires, where he consulted officials at the American Embassy, including Lt. John S. Hammond, the military attaché there.

"I have \$400,000 to invest in cattle lands," the promoter told Hammond in their first conversation. "Where shall I put it?"

The young officer suggested that he try the part of the Gran Chaco which lies in Paraguay. "The government there," he said, "for years has been leasing vast tracts of lands to foreigners on very advantageous terms."

"What sort of foreigners?" asked Rickard.

"Germans, mostly. They have a lot of influence in this part of the world. Prussian officers, you know, train the army of Paraguay."

Tex nodded and shortly afterward made a deal to take over five million acres of land and stock part of it with cattle. Before starting for the interior with Edith Mae, however, he sent to Texas for ten cowboys. He wanted them to supervise the work of the hundreds of Indian natives he intended to employ.

Rickard was the first American thousands of barbaric Indians living in his part of the Gran Chaco ever saw. On 325,000 acres of his vast holdings he stocked 50,000 cattle. He worried a bit about overcrowding them because in the Texas of his youth it had been customary to allow ten acres of grazing land per head.

The stories about Tex Rickard's adventures in South America have not shrunk in size or faded in color with the passing years. On his way up the Pilcomayo River Tex discovered five Bolivian forts in Paraguayan territory. On reporting this to a senator at Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, that dignitary exploded and wished to declare war on Bolivia. He offered to pull the strings that would make Tex a general. Rickard told him that the soldiers in the forts were less dangerous than they would be if they were roving the country.

"As it is now," he said, "you know where they are, and they are pinned down there night and day. And you know just where to go if you ever decide to capture them and the forts." When his advice was taken, Tex was established as a great peacemaker and diplomat.

Tex later bought a small circus and toured with it to all the villages of the Gran Chaco and in and out of the cities along the coasts of Brazil and the Argentine. At Buenos Aires, Rickard found he could live in a suite in the city's finest hotel for less than a stable owner charged him for the daily keep of each of his circus's three tigers.

"Them cats are living higher than me," exclaimed Tex.

While in Buenos Aires that year, Tex fell in love with a \$10,000 custom-made British automobile. He bought it and hired a chauffeur to drive it to his Paraguay jungle home. Though he and the chauffeur progressed only a few miles each day, the resplendent

car stunned the natives into a state of gibbering enchantment. But after a couple of weeks, the big glittering car got bogged down. Mules and horses were commandeered, but could not budge it. With a regretful shake of the head, Rickard abandoned the costly car and completed his trip by slow train and on horseback.

It was while he was living in South America that Tex won the admiration of Theodore Roosevelt, who was leading a large party of explorers, naturalists, and big-game hunters through the surrounding jungles. The former President described the promoter in *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*. They met on the combined yacht and gunboat of the President of Paraguay which Roosevelt had borrowed.

"With me on the gunboat," wrote Teddy in his book, "was an old Western friend, Tex Rickard, of the Panhandle and Alaska and various places in between. He now has a large tract of land and some 35,000 head of cattle in the Chaco, opposite Concepción, at which city he is to stop. He told me that horses did not do so well in the Chaco, but that cattle thrived, and while ticks swarmed on the east bank of the great river, they would not live on the west bank. Again and again he had crossed herds of cattle which were covered with loathsome bloodsuckers, and in a couple of months every tick would be dead."

Roosevelt discovered that the natives were devoted to Tex. He was generous to them, and always fair in business dealings. He also remained a sports promoter there, regularly staging boxing, wrestling, and cattle-roping contests, with prizes for the winners.

Early in April, 1915, Tex and Edith Mae returned to New York. He had become the representative of the Farquar interests in Paraguay, but he told reporters that his business affairs were in good enough shape for him to spend six months each year in the States. Currently he was in New York to complete arrangements to ship large quantities of beef to England, which was being pinched by the World War I meat shortage.

Tex abruptly stopped talking about the cattle business when the ship news reporters told him that Jack Johnson had lost his title to Jess Willard in Havana a few days before. Having been on the high seas, Rickard had heard nothing about this. As always,

he found the idea that a heavyweight champion had been beaten all but unbelievable.

"I'm very much surprised," he said. "I saw Johnson in Buenos Aires only two months ago. He looked as good as ever to me."

Rickard was even more surprised on meeting Willard for the first time. A giant out of Kansas, and part Cherokee Indian, Willard had the physical equipment to become the greatest heavyweight champion of modern times. He was 6 feet 7 inches tall, weighed 252 pounds, and had the strength of an ox. A homely, shy, clumsy man, Jess unfortunately was as gentle and sensitive as Ferdinand the Bull. Unless goaded almost beyond endurance he would not punch with all his strength, no matter whom he was fighting. His natural aversion to hurting anyone had increased vastly since he killed a fighter named Bull Young two years before.

The best explanation of the new heavyweight champion's attitude toward his work is found in a letter he wrote to a friend when his ring days were over. In this, Jess declared, "God made me a giant. I never received an education, never had money, and my folks, God bless them, never had any money. I knew that I was a big fellow and powerful strong. I just sat down and figured out that a man as big as me ought to be able to cash in on his size and that was what started me on the road to boxing.

"So I got this boxing game into my head. I never liked it; in fact, I hated it as I never hated a thing previously, but there was money in it. I needed the money and decided to go after it.

"I never really knew how to fight. In the fights I engaged in I never could do anything to the other fellow in the way of damage. I simply couldn't do it. Harming the other fellow seemed to me to be cruel, and so long as the other fellow didn't harm me much I couldn't see any reason why I should hurt him.

"I never hurt any of my opponents before the eighth round because not one of them was able to hurt me much before the eighth round, and when they did hurt me I got real mad and just swung on them and settled matters as quickly as I could. But even then I didn't like this boxing business. It was the dough I liked, and I went after all I could get."

That the ring services of this passionately peaceful cowboy

should have been required to dethrone Jack Johnson five years after Reno is ample evidence of the collapsed state of the once-pugnacious Caucasian spirit.

It wasn't as though fight managers everywhere had not tried to find a hardy slugger with the proper pigmentation to humble the impudent, always grinning, black man. The search for a "white hope," as it was called, began the day after the catastrophe. Jack Curley, Dumb Dan Morgan, Jimmy Johnston, Tom O'Rourke, and other masterminds of the boxing industry literally scouted the whole civilized world in their search for the right chap. They held white-hope tournaments, constantly advertised in the newspapers for new aspirants.

Curley, the promoter of the Havana bout, bankrupted himself feeding a small army of brawny hobos, seamen, ironmongers, piano movers, and drivers of beer trucks without finding a single lad with the energy to do much more than fight his way out of bed in the morning. Curley, who, like Rickard, was an incurable optimist, kept dreaming of discovering some troglodyte with fists like iron mallets. But all he found were big fellows whose resemblance to cavemen was displayed only at the training table.

Meanwhile the appalled white supremacists on Capitol Hill had done their best to destroy Johnson by legislation and due process of law. For his special personal harassment they passed, in 1912, the Mann Act which forbade the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes. The other anti-Jack Johnson law, the one against bringing fight movies across state lines, cost white men many millions of dollars. Jack Dempsey asserts that before it was repealed more than twenty years later the law cost him personally two million dollars he would have earned from the movies of his fights.

The never-repealed Mann Act, of course, has since inconvenienced two generations of timid big-business executives who did not dare to take their own secretaries or other women to conventions at Atlantic City.

The year after the Act was passed, Johnson was caught and arrested on a train in the company of Lucille Cameron, a beautiful white girl. He was indicted though both of them protested that she was merely his social secretary. Johnson, whose first white wife had

committed suicide the year before, married Miss Cameron before the trial. This made it impossible for the government to use her as a witness against him. However, the undiscouraged representatives of Mr. Whiskers produced other witnesses on whose evidence he was convicted and sentenced to a year and a day in the Federal penitentiary.

While his case was being appealed, Johnson escaped to Canada disguised as a baseball player, and eventually made his way to France. He fought three bouts there, one of which was with a Russian wrestler, before being lured back to the Western Hemisphere by Curley's offer of \$30,000 to fight Willard in Havana.

By all accounts it was a terrible fight. Johnson proved flabby and out of condition. Just before the twenty-sixth round started, Johnson realized he could not continue. He sent word to his wife to leave the arena. He did not want her to see him knocked out, he said later.

Johnson went down in that round under what seemed light blows. As he lay on the canvas, gasping for breath, Jack put one hand over his eyes to shield them from the sun's glare. Afterward this brought on charges that he had thrown the fight. During the barren years that followed, Jack picked up a pretty penny confessing this was true, then denying it, then confessing anew, and denying it again. Johnson kept this up until he ran out of editors who were willing to pay him for contradicting himself.

His conqueror, on the other hand, earned practically nothing from his life story, which was dull and uninspiring. But Willard's strength could not be denied. Honest Charlie Murray, the Buffalo promoter so nicknamed because he was supposed never to have lied even to his wife, swore he had seen Willard hit an opponent, Sailor White, so hard that White's whole body went sailing up in the air until it was parallel with the top rope, before it began descending.

But that was before Jess killed Bull Young. Since then the chief problem of Willard's handlers had been to convince him that he could slug an opponent without committing manslaughter. Soon after Young's death, Jimmy Johnston scared Willard out of knocking out his man, Boer Rodel, a fighter who went to pieces when breathed on heavily. Johnston did it by continually claiming during

the fight that Rodel had a weak heart. "Remember poor Bull Young," he kept saying to Jess from outside the ropes. "He looked all right too until you socked him good."

Despite the aspersions cast on his victory over Jack Johnson, Willard was hailed as a conquering hero on his return from Havana. But after playing two weeks of vaudeville at \$5,000 a week, the big fellow joined a circus and wild West show where he admitted he felt more at home than in the ring.

Jack Curley held an option on Willard's ring services. When this expired on February 1, 1916, promoters started bidding for a title bout between Jess and one of three possible white opponents. They were Fred Fulton, a gangling string bean of an ex-plasterer from Minnesota; Frank Moran, a jolly, redheaded sailor; and Jack Dillon, who weighed less than 170, but had knocked out so many bigger men he was nicknamed "Jack the Giant Killer."

Willard eliminated Dillon at once, saying he wished to look no more ridiculous than was necessary in the ring. In the end, he decided Moran would prove a better drawing card than Fulton.

Jimmy Johnston, who was currently promoting the fights at Madison Square Garden, was among the several top bidders for the title battle.

Rickard, who had remained around New York in hopes of getting the bout, outbid the other serious promoters with an offer of \$60,000. Two-thirds of this was to go to Willard, the balance to Moran. But Willard's manager, Tom Jones, contended that Tex had promised the champion an extra bonus of \$7,500 for signing the papers. Though Rickard denied this, he settled for a \$5,000 bonus. Then, though Moran had already signed for a \$20,000 fee, Tex gave him an extra \$2,500, because he had promised to give Moran one-half of whatever he paid Willard.

As often happens in the dear old boxing game, everything about this match proved more interesting than the fight itself. Tex had set his heart on staging it in Madison Square Garden.

But this also meant that it would have to be a no-decision, ten-round affair—all that the New York State law allowed at the time. It also meant putting himself at the mercy of Jimmy Johnston, who had ten hungry little mouths to feed besides his own and Mrs. Johnston's.



For years the rent of the Garden had been \$1,000 to \$1,500 a night, and Tex knew it. Nevertheless, Johnston demanded 25 per cent of the gross receipts for the use of his hall. By the time Jimmy had dickered Tex up to \$7,500, he had Rickard in a rage.

"That's five times more than you could get from anyone else," he declared.

Johnston nodded. "Nothing wrong with your arithmetic, Tex, is there?"

"I am going to break your lease," Tex told Johnston. Then he added for good measure, "And run you out of town."

Johnston, a tough-minded London cockney of Irish descent, laughed and said that better men than Tex Rickard had tried that. "Not only am I still here," he bragged, "but my lease on the Garden doesn't run out until the end of next year, and I have the option to renew it." Before the deal was set, Jimmy, living up to his nickname of "The Boy Bandit," squeezed \$15,000 rental money out of Tex, plus \$400 for the use of the concessions.

The exorbitant rental proved to be a small item compared to the financial working-over Tammany Hall experts attempted to give Rickard. If he had yielded to all of the politicians' demands he could have filled the Garden that night, from ringside to the top-most gallery, without bothering to open the box office. The politicians demanded tickets and money for worthy causes, unworthy causes, and for their personal needs.

Remembering his dismal experiences with similar birds of prey in San Francisco and Seattle, Tex kept paying off men he was told could be helpful. But after being assured everybody had been taken care of, another Tammany Hall man called on him and demanded \$10,000.

"What can you do for me that's worth ten thousand dollars?" Rickard asked, wearily.

The Tammany man shrugged. "I've done nothing, but I need the ten thousand because I'm building a new home for my family." Needless to say, he left empty-handed.

There was new excitement almost daily over the fight which, after being postponed once, was scheduled for March 25. One night counterfeit tickets were found to be in circulation. Next state assemblyman Marty McCue, a one-time pugilist, wanted the fight

banned. He said that a rank outsider like Tex Rickard should not be permitted to make money promoting a big fight while so many New York promoters were sitting around doing nothing. There was an uproar from fans who had paid 25 cents each to see the sluggish champion box at his training quarters near the Garden. They complained of not getting their money's worth.

Moran was at Saratoga, 175 miles from New York and training as though he really expected to take Willard's title from him. Though only twenty-nine, three years younger than Jess, Moran had already established himself as a dandy, a wit, a great ladies' man and a scrapper who had fought his way around the world. Frank had put in time in the U.S. Navy and also as a deck hand on J. P. Morgan's yacht, the *Corsair*. He was a new type in boxing circles, a wholesome-looking, freckled-faced strawberry blond who had, as Ned Brown puts it, "class as a man."

Frank liked the girls wherever he found them, on Broadway, in old Piccadilly, and on the boulevards of Paris. One of his sweethearts was the agile Pearl White, the great movie-serial queen. Another was Lillian Lorraine, the most seductive beauty ever to grace the Ziegfeld Follies.

Frank was a dead game fighter but had only one first-rate punch, a roundhouse right-hand swing that he threw from the floor. Being an ex-nautical man he called this blow his "Mary Ann."

Moran had had many strange and wonderful fights in foreign countries, and could talk about them with skill and humor. He had knocked out the brilliant British boxer, Bombadier Billy Wells, with Mary Ann, but said modestly that "Wells was all chin from the waist up."

Frank could also laugh—though a bit wryly—over his losing, twenty-round fight in Paris with Jack Johnson for the world title two years before. Neither he nor Johnson had been paid a sou.

Dan McKetrick, the American who promoted this match, had also been Moran's manager. But when McKetrick wanted the red-head to sign a paper attesting to this, Moran refused. McKetrick then petulantly threw the entire gate receipts into litigation, and kept the money there, despite the wails of champion and challenger. Before their lawyers could even prepare proper briefs, World War I came along and put the money into escrow for the

duration. When the war was over no one in Paris could find any trace of the impounded cash.

Moran was not given much chance against Willard, who was a half foot taller and outweighed him by more than 50 pounds. But Rickard was delighted by the great public interest in the fight and heavy advance sale. A couple of days before the fight, he told W. O. McGeehan, "Wait till you see all of the nice people I'm going to have at the fight. A lot of millionaires and governors and society ladies are going to be there. I can hardly believe what is happening to this business."

With a success assured, Tex—against all boxing promotion tradition—kept worrying about the quality of the fight. Injudiciously, he told reporters, "I have offered these two men a greater sum than they are worth in a ten-round bout. I only hope they will deliver the best fight they can."

On the night of March 25, the Garden bulged with the biggest fight crowd ever assembled there. Celebrities from various high and low social planes attended in evening clothes, giving the event the touch of class that Rickard had so long hoped would one day distinguish one of his big boxing shows. There were also a couple of hundred women present.

Unfortunately, the fight was a boring affair. It was filmed by a movie company which hoped to make a profit by exhibiting the fight pictures just in New York State. In the interest of advancing their science, the movie men experimented with green lights. These made both fighters and Charlie White, the referee, look like goblins. Willard's weight was 252, Moran's 203.

There was only a single exciting round, the seventh, which Tad described in Mr. Hearst's *New York Evening Journal* in these words:

They met. Willard hooked a vicious left to Moran's head, sending his man back upon his heels. Blood ran down Moran's cheek from the gash over the eyebrow. In the green Cooper-Hewitt lights put up by the movie men, that gave those at the ringside a deathlike pallor, the blood on Moran's face resembled corroded copper.

Willard gave him no rest. He uppercut with both hands, sending the blond head of Moran's back as though it was

on hinges. Willard with the victory in sight beat his man from post to post. Moran wobbled on his feet, covered his lowered head with his arms and kept as close as he could to the wild-eyed giant in front of him. . . . It looked as though he was done for. He looked up, and his face was covered with blood. He looked as though he wore a green mask. . . .

Willard tore in again. He battered the challenger to a neutral corner. Moran let go a weak left that went right over Willard's head. The house was up on its feet. . . . Moran saw that Jess looked tired. He caught Willard in the pit of the stomach with the left hand . . . followed this with a righthand swing that caught Willard flush on the jaw, sending him to the ropes. . . . Moran didn't stop for a second, but whaled away with all that was in him, and he had plenty left. He kept Willard with his back to the ropes, belted his face and body.

Women were screaming, seconds were waving towels, old men with silk hats were throwing them in the air. They were seeing a champion fought right off his feet.

New York *Journal* readers must have been bewildered by Tad's complaint that the fight, except for that one electrifying round, had been tiresome. On the front page of the *Journal*, and on the page opposite Tad's fight story, was a denunciation of "the ghastly spectacle of two big human animals trying to render one another unconscious with clenched fists. . . . Willard, a giant of 252 pounds, cut into ribbons and drove before him Moran, a dwarf by comparison. There was never a chance for Moran. The blood cascaded down his face and was smeared to the four corners of the ring . . . women, fashionably attired and occupying ring boxes, turned away from the demoralizing spectacle."

This strange editorial conflict was due to a last-minute decision of Mr. Hearst to make a frontal assault on professional boxing as a social evil. Taking it for granted that the Garden battle would be a savage affair, he had his editors send wires to hundreds of prominent clergymen all over the country, asking them to denounce the fight by collect telegram. When the clergy complied, Mr. Hearst blandly went ahead with his crusade.

John L. Sullivan said he wished he had never seen such a fight.

"If them two bums are champion and challenger," he said, "I'll take on both of them the same night." On reading in the Hearst papers of the bestial brutishness of the fight, Sullivan sneered, "The only brutal thing about the Willard-Moran match was the prices they charged to see those two chumps box. If that fight was brutal men have become chicken-hearted beyond endurance."

And when Moran, the victim, was asked about the brutality of the contest, he said, "I don't think there was any because I didn't hurt Willard much."

If no one else enjoyed the fight, Rickard did. He told the sports writers the day after the battle that there had been a \$152,000 gate, the largest in sports history for an indoor attraction. After paying all expenses, he had a net profit of \$42,000. He added:

"I'm satisfied that the fight was a success, that the public has no kick, and you newspaper fellows can't say anything terrible about me."

But boxing was killed in New York State the following year, thanks to Mr. Hearst's crusade and unsavory behavior of professional promoters and alleged misconduct by a member of the New York State Athletic Commission. Meanwhile, Mr. Willard had returned to the pleasant life of a circus and wild West show star.

# 12

## The land of beginning again

OLD DOC KEARNS is still around, as this is written, and doing what finagling he can with such cut-rate champs as are available. But if he is awarded any place in sports history it is unlikely to be for his astonishing durability, or even for being the greatest holler guy and all-around cutie the fight business ever produced.

It will be as Jack Dempsey's manager.

In a way, that seems unfair, for Doc is a man of many talents and varied accomplishments, even if these are not always the sort admired by stiffies corroded by moral principles.

As a spender during the twenties, for instance, there was nobody around Broadway who could compete with Doc. His ability to make money disappear quickly approximated genius.

So long as the gold was gushing in at Kearns at top speed he ran a twenty-four-hour-a-day circus wherever he sat down. Everybody was welcome—dames, con men, actors, clowns, and all other frowsy, funny, and fruity characters. Only folks who didn't care for the hot foot, the goose, and other robust belly-laugh getters were frozen out.

And Doc picked up the tab for one and all as long as he had

the scratch. Sometimes he kept his circus running until he was down to his best friend's last dime.

Night after night, you could find him at Texas Guinan's or whatever other tinsel-trimmed sucker trap was the hot place at the moment. Having tucked Dempsey into bed, Kearns would stay around until closing time, buying drinks for friends and strangers alike, and tipping the performers in currency with the big numbers on it. "Perfumery Jack" they called him because of his habit of keeping himself doused in the finest scented waters from Paris, France.

It was always pleasant, and sometimes exciting, to watch that pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, ex-welterweight enjoying himself with unabated zest until the wee hours. Doc demanded action all of the time, never wanted to go home. He could go without sleep or food for surprising stretches so long as there was something to laugh at, shake hands over or fight about, bet on, and, of course, something around fit to drink.

And during the years Doc had Dempsey, then Mickey Walker, he whirled through and whistled away about four million dollars.

Almost as violent as Mr. Kearns's compulsion to squander himself into insolvency were his tantrums. When Dempsey did or said anything that annoyed him he thought nothing of twisting his comparatively small fist under his champion's nose and threatening to cripple him.

Dempsey, who could have broken Kearns in half with one solid slap, has never been able to figure out why he let his manager get away with that sort of thing.

"I was capable of throwing him out of the window," says Dempsey, "and he knew it. I guess I never did it because I figured he expected me to."

Most of the time, of course, Doc was drunk or playful when he threatened his heavyweight champion with chastisement. But his detestation of Tex Rickard was something else entirely. It was sincere and straight from the heart. Many times the mere thought of the promoter would cause the glib Kearns to splutter, explode, and all but foam at the mouth. Doc's original beef against the promoter was that Tex had gypped him out of a large fortune before they were so much as properly introduced.

Tex burned up Doc more than anyone else did because he felt that Rickard had reversed roles with him when he was off guard and in no position to defend himself. In his book Tex was the mark, and was supposed to remain one. For so ingenious and hard-working a fast-buck operator as himself to be outsmarted by such a rube and country boy Doc considered a disgrace he could never live down.

It was a waste of time to remind Kearns that this was precisely the sort of thing he was forever boasting of pulling on others. His ego was king-size and absolute. Doc considered it unfair for anyone else to slip him a dose of his own medicine. There was nothing unclear about his attitude; he simply talked and acted as though he had been born with the divine right to chisel, swindle, and outwit others at will, while remaining immune from retaliation.

The fortune Doc accused Rickard of gypping him out of was named Les Darcy. Darcy, an Australian middleweight who became world-famous during the first years of World War I, was an earth-shaker, all right, one of those magnificent fighters that only seem to come along each ten years or so. Yet Darcy could not possibly have earned a dollar for Jack Kearns unless the cards had fallen a good deal differently. Nevertheless, Kearns refused to forgive Tex even when he, Dempsey, and Rickard were making millions of dollars together.

Doc had his first chance to admire Darcy under what anyone else might have regarded as humiliating circumstances. In 1915 he was touring in Australia with a small stable of California fighters. Darcy badly beat one of them, Billy Murray, in a twenty-round bout. Unable to believe the local boy could be as good as he looked, Doc clamored for a rematch, and got it seven weeks later. This time Darcy knocked out Murray.

Instead of being distressed about his tiger being belted out, Kearns immediately arranged to manage Darcy in the United States if the boy ever got there. At least, Doc had the impression the deal was set.

All of the time Kearns was in Australia and for a year afterward Les Darcy continued beating more crack American middleweights. He put away Eddie McGoorty twice, outpointed George (K.O.)



Brown and the clever Jimmy Clabby twice each, and knocked out George Chip, the ex-world middleweight champion.

Meanwhile Kearns was talking up Les Darcy as his new wonder fighter wherever he went. The way he told it, he was using his powerful international connections to smuggle the kid out of Australia. He admitted that this presented certain difficulties as the British Empire, including Australia, was at war with Germany and for the moment needed all its able-bodied young men for war service.

On October 27, 1916, four days before Les Darcy's twenty-first birthday, he slipped out of Sydney aboard an oil steamer bound for South America. He had neither a passport nor permission to leave from the military authorities who planned to put him into military training on the day he came of age. Darcy was accompanied by a young friend, E. T. O'Sullivan, a hostler.

Though the Australian newspapers immediately denounced Darcy as a slacker, Kearns glowed on hearing the news. One day he announced that he had arranged with Jack Curley and Tom Jones to co-manage the young man when Darcy got to the States. When someone asked Doc if he wouldn't say Darcy was Australia's biggest box-office attraction since Bob Fitzsimmons and Mme. Nellie Melba, he replied, "No, I wouldn't say that. I'd say he is bigger than Fitz and the madam wrapped up in one package." He warned other managers to "lay off Les as I have him signed up legally, and every other way."

Meanwhile there were all sorts of rumors about Les Darcy and O'Sullivan landing at points up and down both coasts of South America and North America. One story had them changing ships in mid-ocean. Just before Christmas it was authoritatively announced that Les Darcy was approaching New York aboard the oil steamer *Cushing*. Despite Kearns's warnings, every fight manager within hundreds of miles of New York immediately started plotting how to lure the wonder fighter away from him.

From the beginning, Charlie Harvey had chuckled at Kearns's boasts. Since coming to New York from London as a young fellow, Charlie, an innocent-eyed man with a droopy mustache, had monopolized the British bruisers exported to the States.

Confiding in no one, Charlie now scurried down to Stapleton, Staten Island, which is close to the spot in Lower New York Bay where the *Cushing* would be presently dropping anchor for quarantine. There Harvey chartered a fishing smack with a reliable auxiliary motor and ordered its skipper to stand by.

Tom O'Rourke, another wily veteran manager, meanwhile had conned the United States Health Service doctors who would conduct the medical inspection aboard the *Cushing* to take him along with them.

Tex Rickard said that even though he himself was not a fight manager he thought it no more than courteous to go down the bay to meet and greet such an illustrious visitor as Les Darcy. For this purpose he had chartered the tug *F. B. Dalziell*. Tex invited all managers, sports writers, and rival promoters to join him on this vessel. He promised to have food and a variety of fine liquors aboard.

The *F. B. Dalziell* took off in the middle of the night and arrived at the side of the *Cushing* at 4:30 A.M. Among the managers who had taken advantage of Tex's hospitality—and hoped it wouldn't prove just another boat ride—were Billy McCarney, Dumb Dan Morgan, Billy Gibson, Leo P. Flynn, Joe Woodman, George Lawrence, and a delegation from Philadelphia, including Mr. Max (Boo Boo) Hoff, Jimmy Dougherty, and Herman (Muggsy) Taylor.

From the deck of the *Cushing* the skipper, Captain Herland, shouted down to the tug that only Mr. Rickard and three others would be permitted aboard. With all the managers giving him coy looks, Tex selected two aides he had brought along with him and a newspaper photographer.

No member of the Kearns-Curley-Jones combination had shown up. But by that time Charlie Harvey and Tom O'Rourke had been aboard the oil ship for an hour. Both of them had been running all over the ship in opposite directions. They had been unable to find out whether Darcy was hiding, or even if he was aboard. No member of the crew, it appeared, cared to say.

When the weary and discouraged Tom O'Rourke saw Tex boarding the *Cushing* he told Harvey, "I'm quitting, and if you're smart you will, too."

"You mean Tex is gonna front for Kearns and the other two?"

O'Rourke groaned, "That guy fronts for nobody but himself. He's his own main tent."

"Then why should we quit going after Darcy?" whispered Harvey.

"Because nobody like you or me, Charlie, is gonna get him. We want something from this kid. So do Kearns and the others. Tex Rickard is the only guy who comes after him, wanting to give something."

"What, for instance?"

"Money, for instance. Or anything else that he needs. That's how the guy got Gans, Nelson, Jack Johnson, Willard, all of them."

When he came aboard Tex pretended not to see the two fight managers who were watching every move he made. Instead, he waited for his two aides to join him. When they did, he told them:

"Now, you boys go below and bring up that young fellow, Darcy. Tell him Tex Rickard is waiting to see him. Bring up that O'Sullivan too. Tell 'em everything is gonna be square and fair and above-board on this proposition."

Then, as his aides scooted away, Tex turned to O'Rourke and Harvey as though noticing them for the first time. "Kinda chilly out, ain't it, boys?" he asked. They grunted, and Tex grinned.

"What do you suppose ever happened to that Jack Kearns?" he asked. "Don't see him nowhere around, do you? Well, maybe like he said, he's got this Darcy sewed up so tight he don't have to bother coming out here to say hello to him."

Tex hardly had finished talking when Les Darcy, a brawny, smiling young man in a blue serge suit, came up to him and held out his hand. He was accompanied by O'Sullivan, Captain Herland, and Tex's two aides. Rickard introduced them to the awed fight managers at his side. Then he took O'Sullivan and Darcy to the other end of the ship for a little chat.

On his return he told Harvey and O'Rourke, "Les tells me O'Sullivan is going to act as his manager and sole representative while he's here." As though taking pity on them he added, "Well, that's the arrangement for the present, anyway."

Darcy had signed on the *Cushing* as a crew member. When Captain Herland discharged him, the Australians accepted Tex's

invitation to travel up the bay with him on the tug. Not knowing what else to do, O'Rourke and Harvey also joined the promoter's party.

From the Battery Tex Rickard took his two guests to a suite in the Hotel Broztell, on East 28th Street, which he had reserved for them. There Darcy was interviewed by newspapermen, who were impressed by his straightforward manner. He explained that he had no desire to escape military service but had come to the United States hoping to earn enough money in three or four bouts to provide for his family. He was one of ten children, he said. His father was ill, his older brother crippled, and he was the only one who could provide for his parents and his younger brothers and sisters. He had never made much money at home, \$5,000 being his biggest purse. But he hoped to earn \$50,000 in the States. This would take care of his family, he believed, no matter what happened to him.

"Hugh McIntosh, the Australian promoter, offered to send me here and get me five thousand pounds sterling for three fights," he said. "I would have taken that offer if he'd posted the money beforehand in a bank. But he refused.

"I can't see what's wrong, if he could get me over here, in coming over on my own and providing for my folks."

Rickard, who was listening, asked Les Darcy whom he would like to fight first.

"Anyone, particularly Jess Willard."

Rickard laughed, and slapped the 160-pound fighter on the back. "Young man," he said, "do you know how big Jess Willard is? He is so big he couldn't have got into the pilot house of that tug we were on this morning."

"Is he now?" Darcy asked. "Well, if he's that big I would think there's all the more chance of finding a soft spot on him somewhere."

"I'd rather match you with Georges Carpentier, the Frenchman they're making into such a war hero. You'd draw better with the Frenchmen, son, and he's just about your size, I think."

There was still no trace of Kearns or his co-managers. During the day sports writers in the suite discovered that one of the aides Tex had carried with him that morning to the *Cushing* was a young

fellow who ran a small training track upstate and who had been in Australia recently with a string of horses. Tex had hired him, figuring that O'Sullivan and he would have enough in common to become very chummy. Rickard apparently had thought of all the angles, including wiring one of his associates in South America to meet the *Cushing* and arrange for the visitors to become his guests while in the States.

The next day Harry Pollok, a boxing promoter, telephoned Ned Brown, at the *World*, and asked him to meet him as soon as possible in the wood-paneled taproom of the Hotel Prince George, which was around the corner from the Broztell.

"I have Jack Kearns, a fight guy from California, with me who needs some advice and maybe a little help," Pollok said. "As you know they serve the best ale in town here. We are drinking it out of pewter mugs with glass bottoms."

Brown had never met Kearns, but said he would be right over. However, on joining the party he hardly had a chance to dip his bill in his mug of ale before Kearns started talking.

"I'm manager of this here feller Darcy," Doc said. "I'm supposed to manage him in the States. That's the deal I made with him in Sydney, Australia."

"Well, why don't you go upstairs and see him then?" asked the sports writer.

"Rickard is keeping me out, the rat. Every other bum in the world he lets in, but not me."

Darcy was in Suite 702 of the Broztell. Brown, who had already interviewed him for his column "Pardon My Glove," said he would go up to see him. "Two minutes after I start," he told Kearns, "you go up to the sixth floor and wait for me near the elevator landing there. The minute I get the okay from Darcy for you to come up, I'll hurry down and tell you."

There were reporters from other newspapers in the suite's parlor. They were talking with O'Sullivan and drinking from the large stock of liquor Tex Rickard had sent up. Darcy was in the bedroom, resting. On going in, the *World* man asked Darcy if he recalled meeting Jack Kearns in Australia.

"Oh, yus, yus."

"Did you arrange for him to represent you here?"

Darcy said something, but the sports editor couldn't understand what it was. He asked the question again. Once more the reply was incomprehensible. "This is a clever young fellow," thought Brown. "His accent thickens heavily whenever he wishes it to." Darcy had had no difficulty making himself understood in their earlier interview.

"Would you like to see him?"

"Yus, yus."

"He'll be up here in a few minutes," said Brown. "But don't tell anyone I arranged it." Les Darcy nodded.

Brown then went downstairs to the floor below and waited ten minutes. Kearns didn't appear. "My God," thought Brown, "the fellow doesn't look too bright, but he can't be stupid enough to get me to take all this trouble, then not show up."

He walked up two flights, down four, back to the sixth-floor landing. No Kearns. He called out his name, sang it, finally yodeled for him. Exhausted and disgusted, he went downstairs, and walked around the corner and into the Prince George's taproom. Pollok was alone at a table. He said Kearns had gone up to the sixth landing and must still be there. In any event he hadn't come down again.

"The hell with him," said Ned Brown, and ordered two fresh beakers of ale for himself. "I will drink one, and then look through its glass bottom, while I drink the other."

Kearns walked in, exploding with indignation. After confusing recriminations back and forth, and much drinking of ale, it developed that Kearns had not realized Darcy was at the Broztell. Believing "upstairs" meant in the Prince George, he had been waiting all this time on its sixth floor.

"More of Tex Rickard's dirty work," Kearns muttered bitterly. "I couldn't have played any dirty tricks on him as yet, because I don't even know him. So it's pure spite."

By the time he finished denouncing Tex and went upstairs again, Les Darcy had gone out to dinner. Beginning with the following morning, O'Sullivan guarded him too closely for any other manager to reach him.

Meanwhile, almost everything written about Darcy was building up the public's interest in him. Bob Edgren described his right arm

as "unbelievable," with "wrists, forearms and hands more powerful than Jeffries' in his prime."

The offers for Darcy's services came in fast that week. Utica, New York, offered \$10,000 for a bout between him and Mike Gibbons, the flashy St. Paul middleweight. A New Orleans promoter offered \$15,000 for the same fight. There were other flattering bids, including vaudeville dates. It looked as though Les Darcy would quickly collect the money he needed for his family.

But Darcy never got a chance to fight here. As the new year began, the war fever had the United States in its grip. Branding Darcy a slacker, Governor Charles S. Whitman barred him from boxing in New York State. The governors of Louisiana and Ohio followed suit. A vaudeville tour quickly fizzled out. Shortly after the United States declared war on Germany on April 16, Darcy contracted pneumonia in Memphis. This was complicated by an attack of typhoid fever, and what was described as a mental breakdown.

On May 24, 1917, the twenty-one-year-old fighter died in a Memphis hospital. In 1917 there were still many persons who believed it possible to die of a broken heart. The fight fans among them insist that this is what happened to Les Darcy.

"I could have got fights for that poor kid and squared all the squawks against him," said Jack Kearns on hearing the sad news. "And I'm not forgetting it was Rickard who stopped me." He accompanied the fighter's remains to the Coast, where a service was held for the dead youth before his casket was shipped to his family in Australia.

On meeting Jack Kearns for the first time, A. J. Liebling observed that he was the only manager in the fight business who never said, "We was hit after the bell!" or "We sure beat the ears off that dum-dum." Liebling pointed out that Kearns does not even allow his fighter a share in the personal pronoun. This is quite true. Doc invariably puts it this way: "I win that one in a breeze!" or "I only lose when I breaks my arm in the seventh!"

In a recent broadcast to ballyhoo a fight Doc proved that the years had robbed him of none of his self-esteem by referring to

"1919 when I won the world heavyweight title from Jess Willard at Toledo."

Doc was born John Leo McKernon at Waterloo, Michigan, on August 17, 1882. However, his years of boyish innocence—a period that ended when he was about eight—were spent in Oakland, California. His family, like Rickard's and Jack Dempsey's, was very poor. He also had to leave home early and scratch for a living after very little schooling. However, Kearns acquired in his teens a most useful informal education as a bouncer in the dives and thieves' nests along San Francisco's Barbary Coast.

Though small to be beating out the brains of brawny sailors and other male visitors, Kearns was fearless. He soon was working as a saloon bouncer and won himself a place as a leader of San Francisco's younger spittoon-heaving-and-broken-bottle-slashing social set. You had to be tough and very quick about it on the Barbary Coast, or you were carted off in short order to the hospital or the city morgue.

In his teen years Mr. Kearns also enlarged his real-life social studies by wandering up to the Northwest where he did not get into as much trouble as one might have expected of a lad with his bubbling character and aggressive turn of mind. Some historians assert that he participated in the Alaskan gold rush, but this is hard to prove one way or another. It is useless to ask Jack Kearns himself if such tales are true. He is not a man to deny a good story about himself, or even a crummy one.

But it is fairly well established that Kearns worked as a cow hand on the 79 Ranch, near Billings, Montana, and also as a taxi driver in Seattle. A pretty good ball player, he got a tryout with the Seattle team of the Pacific Coast League. The manager told him he would let him know his decision shortly. While waiting, Doc started fighting as a lightweight under the name of Jack Kearns. He quickly grew into the welterweight class, but this was the only progress he was able to make as a leather thrower. The apex of his active ring years was reached when he had the honor to be knocked out in two rounds by Honey Mellody, who later became world welterweight champion, in the latter's professional debut.

After sixty-odd bouts Kearns decided to seek a brighter and less lumpy future as a manager of other fighters. For a tireless tooter



of his own horn, he is surprisingly modest about his own ring record. "I was always a poor judge of distance in a fight," he says. "I never knew how long I was going to last or how far I was going to fall."

But Kearns did not have much luck as a manager either until he was thirty-five, and latched onto Jack Dempsey. The going had been pretty rugged for the whole fight business in California since the banning of the Johnson-Jeffries battle. Only four-round bouts were permitted, which reduced the earnings of everyone, even the gamblers. At one point Kearns's fortunes fell so low that he took over the handling of a 250-pound wrestler whom he labeled "Mystery Man." Doc got so much publicity for this large tub of lard that he was able to con Jack Curley, then managing Joe Stecher, world heavyweight champion, into giving his boy a match.

Some inquisitive sports writer out there on the Coast sneaked into the gym one day where "Mystery Man" was training for Stecher. He reported that Kearns's pride and prospective meal ticket that afternoon stepped into his water bucket and fell out of the ring.

In canceling the match, Curley told Kearns, "You should know by this time that there are certain things even wrestling fans will not stand for."

The pickings in the fight racket kept getting slimmer. One year a rival of Doc's had to resort to an extraordinary device in order to get eating money for himself and his fighter.

He was the son of a deceased preacher who had left him only his Bible, a dozen turned-around collars, and two black suits. Each Saturday afternoon this manager would put on one of the suits and a turned-around collar. Then, with Holy Book in hand, he would get on one of the ferryboats that run between Oakland and San Francisco with his battler.

Once on board, the two would separate to give the pugilist a chance to talk to some young couple who had a suitcase with them. Posing as a city detective, the fighter would interview them, asking if they were married, where they were going, and what they had in the suitcase. If they betrayed nervousness he would grill the youngsters until the girl or boy broke down and confessed they

were on their way to a weekend of unsanctified love-making in a hotel. With a sigh the fighter would then explain it was his unpleasant duty to arrest them as soon as the ferryboat got in. On being begged for consideration he suggested they marry at once. Looking about the boat, he would discover the manager, bring him over, have him marry them. The bogus preacher always threw in for free one of the wedding licenses he carried with him. And he never charged the lovers more for his services than they happened to have on them at the moment.

"By now," said the manager recently, "some of them young couples must have children and grandchildren. I guess I married a couple of hundred of youngsters before my old man's second black suit wore out."

The meeting of the two Jacks was the luckiest thing that ever happened to either of them. There have been many accounts of this historic occasion, which took place during 1917 while Kearns was still bemoaning the loss of Les Darcy. The most romantic is the one that Kearns himself gave to Bud Spencer, sports editor of the *San Francisco News*.

"I am in Al White's bar in Oakland that night," Kearns explained. "I was just setting there, drinking myself into happy time. I am also having an argument with Dock Hansen, a middleweight I managed once. He is complaining because I didn't take him to Australia with me. He is beefing that he could lick Billy Murray, and Watson, another fighter I had on the trip, both in the same night.

"Pretty soon I am swinging blows with Hansen and one of his friends. They get me down, and are ready to put the boots to me. The next thing I know a young bruiser I never see before comes up, swinging both fists. Next the fight is all over and this dark-haired bruiser has stiffened both Hansen and the other chump, and cleaned out the joint.

"So I took to this young bruiser. He is a tough-looking, unshaven gorilla, with jet-black hair, deep-set eyes. He also has high cheekbones, shaggy eyebrows, and his hair is scrambled in a short pompadour. I get talking to him and he says his name is Jack Dempsey."

But the two Jacks didn't become a team until quite a while after the brawl in Al White's Oakland saloon. At that moment Dempsey was in more sorts of trouble than Kearns, a situation that has not repeated itself.

Though only twenty-two, Dempsey was so discouraged he was thinking of hanging up the gloves. He had been banging around the country since turning road kid at fourteen. In the eight years since, he had gone through enough bad times to break the heart of a crocodile. While waiting for a money fight, he had worked for small wages as a miner, on farms and ranches, and at anything else he could get.

The fights had paid off in little more than uppercuts. Once Jack had gone to New York and got his ribs smashed in by a more experienced fighter. For one ten-round bout there Dempsey had been paid \$16. Then, when he refused to allow himself to be overmatched against the seasoned Gunboat Smith, or the huge Carl Morris, John Reisler, a barber-fight manager who had bought his contract for buttons, told him, "Kid, you'll never fight in New York again."

Moving on to Philadelphia with his brother Barney, Dempsey ran into even worse times.

On getting back to Salt Lake City, which Dempsey considered his home town (though he was born in Manassa, Colorado), he got a job as a saloon bouncer and fell in love with a Miss Maxine Cates, the piano player. At twenty-one, Dempsey had met few women, and though Maxine, who was older than Jack, told him frankly that she was a prostitute, he married her. They were married at Farmington, Utah, on November 9, 1916, and started life together in a furnished room. They were broke, and Maxine soon began warning Jack that if he didn't bring home some money soon she would leave him and return to her old trade. The idea of losing his wife made Dempsey frantic. On February 13, 1917, he fought Jim Flynn, the Pueblo Fireman, and was knocked out in the first round. He was paid \$500 for his trouble. On getting back to his furnished room, he hid \$300 under the rug, paid the landlady the back room rent, and gave Maxine \$150. He hoped this would encourage her to stay with him.

But his name was mud in Salt Lake City. His friends who had bet on him accused him of throwing the fight to Flynn so the gamblers could clean up. Dempsey angrily denied that he went into the tank for Flynn, and still does.

Unable to get any ring work around Salt Lake City, Jack parked Maxine at his mother's home, and went to the Coast. The story of the Flynn fake preceded him there, though he managed to get a couple of minor engagements.

It was during this period that Dempsey made his Horatio Algeresque rescue of his future manager. But instead of accepting Kearns's offer to handle him, Jack went up to Seattle and worked in a shipyard. Work was steady there due to the war, and he hoped that if he sent his wife money regularly he would be able to hold her.

Kearns had kept writing to Dempsey. But new troubles were plaguing the fighter. One day his mother sent word that his younger brother, Bruce, had been knifed to death in a brawl. Going home, Jack found Maxine gone.

He traced her to Ely, Nevada, the copper-mining town where Rickard had lived a few years before. She had been working in a house of joy there, but left before he got there. He traced her next to Seattle, then halfway across the country to Cairo, Illinois, and finally to Peoria where he caught up with her.

"I like this life," she told him. "Why don't you stop acting like a fool and divorce me?" Dempsey, heartbroken, got the divorce. He was back in Salt Lake, and wondering where his next square meal was coming from when he got another letter from Kearns. It invited him to come to Oakland to live. Pinned to it was a railway ticket and a five-dollar bill.

"The five dollars was to pay for meals on the train," says Dempsey. "That's what bowled me over. I never before had enough money to eat in a train diner."

When Dempsey arrived, Doc installed him in a room at his mother's house in Oakland. She treated him like another son. Even today Dempsey recalls the months he lived in the McKernon home as the happiest of his life. It was for both Jacks like finding the land of beginning again.

Kearns told everybody that he had the next world heavyweight champion. Most important of all, he convinced Dempsey he could whip any man alive, and Jack made no objection to being matched for four-round bouts with Gunboat Smith and Carl Morris, the two heavyweights whom he had refused to fight in New York the year before. Dempsey, fighting with the tigerish abandon which later became his trade-mark, defeated both highly rated heavyweights. After he outpointed old Gunboat Smith, Kearns told him again:

"Kid, you got it. You're gonna be the world's next heavyweight champion."

At the time Dempsey was still growing. He weighed only 170 pounds with rocks in his pockets.

After two more four-rounders on the Coast, Kearns and Dempsey traveled east, sharing the same upper berth to save expenses. They landed in Chicago on January 2, 1918, in the middle of a blizzard, wearing light topcoats and without enough cash for a square meal.

Kearns fended off pneumonia for both of them by borrowing enough money from Jim Mullen, a Chicago sporting figure, for heavier coats, also coffee and cakes. Mullen recommended them as roomers to a kindly, middle-aged Chicago woman who had a son in the ring. She not only let the two Jacks live on the cuff at her house, but made trunks for Dempsey to wear in the ring and nursed the Mauler like a baby when he sprained his ankle.

The two Jacks had signed no contract. Their oral agreement called for a fifty-fifty split on all of Dempsey's earnings. Dempsey was perfectly content with this arrangement. He let Kearns do all the talking and arrange the deals. Whenever the older man asked his opinion, Jack told him, "It's okay with me. Go ahead. You're the doctor." Kearns has been Doc to everyone since.

The two Jacks were still living in the furnished room and wondering when they'd ever be able to pay their board bill when Dempsey read in a local newspaper this statement by Kearns:

I have \$10,000 to lay on the line that my man, Jack Dempsey, can lick any two heavyweights alive, taking them on one after another in the same ring and on the same night.

"I'll fight the two men in one night," he said to Doc, "but where are you getting the ten thousand dollars to bet on me?"

Kearns, throwing a loving punch at him, jumped up and down, and yelled, "What's your beef? We're making the headlines, ain't we? This will get us a big fight."

It did: a fight with Homer Smith, whom Dempsey knocked out in one round. That in turn got a bid for Dempsey against Carl Morris from Honest Charlie Murray, the Buffalo promoter. When they got there, Honest Charlie took one look at Dempsey and tried to call off the match. He pointed out that the 238-pound Morris, in addition to his tremendous weight advantage, was considered the dirtiest fighter in the business.

"I never had a man murdered in my fight club," Murray told Kearns, "and I don't care to begin now." That enraged Kearns.

"Carl Morris only *thinks* he is the world's dirtiest fighter," he said. "I'll outfoul and outgouge that big yellowbelly the minute I get him into the ring with Dempsey."

The bout did turn out to be the dirtiest, foulest, and cruelest in years, with eye thumbing, gouging, corkscrew punches, and groin kneeing by both men. But somehow by the sixth round Carl Morris was a bleeding, blubbering, battered hunk of man, and somehow, Dempsey didn't have a bruise or a lump on him. Morris ended his own agony by fouling out deliberately in the sixth round.

Skippping over to Murray's ringside seat, Dempsey leaned over the ropes and said, "How was I? Did I give satisfaction, Charlie?"

Honest Charlie was popeyed with amazement and admiration. Neither he nor any other fight expert had ever seen a heavyweight like Jack Dempsey, a cyclone in action, a two-fisted human Roman candle, all flame and power, a bobbing, weaving, slugging marvel. Jack had the cruelty necessary for a ring killer, and the ferocity, and belted away as only a man can who has often been desperate and hungry and frightened.

And he tore like a tornado through the rings of the country. Eleven days after disposing of Morris he was in Fort Sheridan, Wyoming, knocking out Pueblo Jim Flynn (his conqueror in the alleged fake of the year before). Ten days after that he knocked out K.O. Bill Brennan at Milwaukee. He hit him so hard that Brennan swung completely around and broke his ankle. By the

middle of the year Dempsey had won nine more bouts by quick knockouts, eight of them in a single round, the other in two rounds. The only opponent he failed to put away was Billy Miske, a fast man of about his own size, who was still there to answer the bell after a ten-round no-decision fight.

Six months after the two Jacks had been shivering and scurrying around Chicago looking for coffee-and-cake money, and also housing on the cuff, only Fred Fulton, the giant plasterer from Minnesota, stood between him and a shot at Willard's title.

Kearns and Rickard met at the Hotel Biltmore bar, in New York, that summer. Doc was drinking there with John (Muggsy) McGraw, the manager of the New York Giants, from whom he had just borrowed \$20. On being introduced to Tex by McGraw, Kearns said, "Instead of shaking hands with you, I ought to punch you right in the nose—that would be for stealing Les Darcy from me."

"A punch in the nose," said Rickard, laughing, "will get you a smack on the whiskers."

Little McGraw, who was one of the more persistent brawlers in the Broadway barroom set of the day, found himself, a little to his amazement, in the role of a pacifier.

"All right," said Kearns, "now what about my boy fighting Willard?"

"The champ's too big for that little feller of yours, Kearns."

"If he takes Fulton," said Kearns, "you can give me fifty thousand for Dempsey's end. For that, I'll furnish you with a challenger that will punch Jess Willard's ears off."

Tex called to the bartender, "Don't give this man any more Martinis."

"You'll be talking different if I knock out Fulton, though." Accustomed to other managers' use of "we," Tex just stared at him.

Despite Dempsey's record, Fred Fulton, who was generally regarded as the logical contender for the heavyweight title, thought Jack would be easy to beat because he was so small. Fulton was 6 feet 4½ inches tall, weighed 220, had an 84-inch reach and a truly lethal left hand. Damon Runyon said Fulton had the only left-hand uppercut he ever saw.

They were matched by Jack Curley for a fight in the Harrison, New Jersey, ball park on July 27, 1918, with Dempsey promised \$12,500 for his end. But the crowd was a disappointment.

Just before ring time Kearns came into Dempsey's dressing room, looking forlorn. "I've been arguing with Curley," he said, "but I can shake only nine thousand dollars out of him."

"Is that bad?" asked Dempsey, getting up to do a little dance. He had never before got anything approaching that for one fight.

That night Jack and Fulton met in the center of the ring before 10,000 spectators. Dempsey circled Fulton, then threw a one-two, consisting of a left-hand wallop to the stomach and a stunning right to the chin. Fulton went down and didn't get up. The fight had lasted eighteen and three-fifths seconds. Many of the paying customers who came in late missed it.

Sammy Nathan, a Brooklyn stevedore, was one of these unfortunate fight fans. With a friend he had traveled from his native Bay Ridge to Harrison on a series of trolley cars, ferries, buses. They got there shortly before the main event started and bought bleacher seats. Though they climbed to the topmost rim of the ball park, the only seats they could find were directly behind one another. Sammy took the one in front.

Sammy Nathan was sort of a gabby fellow. When the men walked out of their corners, he turned around to his friend and said:

"Will ya look at that Fulton. Big bastard, ain't he?"

"Look at him now, Sammy," said the other man. "He looks even bigger stretched out on the canvas."

Though Dempsey, after conquering Fulton, was the logical contender, Kearns kept him fighting here, there, and everywhere. In fourteen more bouts Dempsey scored eleven knockouts, nine of them in one round each. Billy Miske again managed to stay the limit with him, this time in a six-rounder at Philadelphia. Far more surprising is that Jack lost a four-rounder in San Francisco to roly-poly Willie Meehan, whom he had beaten a couple of years before.

Just so his giant killer wouldn't get rusty, Kearns kept him on the road in "Jack Dempsey's Revue." As the feature attraction



each night of this extravaganza, Dempsey boxed three rounds on the stage with the local strong boy.

At each whistle stop Kearns announced beforehand that he would give \$1,000 in cash to any man who could last the full three rounds with his terror. He insured this G-note by acting as both referee and timekeeper.

With Max (the Goose) Kaplan, Dempsey's bodyguard, Doc softened up each small-town Samson by socking him in the stomach while Kaplan hit the challenger over the ribs just before the evening's bout started.

"What a built!" Max the Goose would exclaim joyfully, while Kearns cried out, loudly, "You'll kill that bum Dempsey, Champ!"

Meanwhile, Kearns's dickering with Tex Rickard for a title bout was continuing. Some time before, Tex had signed Willard to fight any man the promoter selected for a \$100,000 fee. The champion was his ace in the hole. But Kearns had a pretty good ace to match it in Dempsey, who had by then bowled over all the logical contenders. His four-round setback by Meeham was not taken very seriously anywhere.

Rickard called on the two Jacks one day in their room at the Hotel Claridge, in New York. Dempsey was lying on the bed. Rickard looked at him and shook his head.

"Every time I see you, Jack," he said, "you look smaller to me."

As usual, Dempsey let Doc do the talking. "What did you come down here for, Tex," Kearns asked, "a beauty contest? When this guy nails them, they stay nailed. They end up looking down their own backs."

"He's too small for Willard," said Tex.

"Too small! Too small! He punches Carl Morris inside out. He puts away Fulton with the first solid blast. Bill Brennan can stay only six rounds with him!"

Tex said the world was ready for a big fight but that Dempsey against Willard would not draw enough. "Jack was lucky with Morris and Fulton," he said, "but they weren't champions. Willard's a better champ than people think."

"Why, this kid here will knock that big yellowbelly of a bum right out of his shoes."

"Willard will take a lot of knocking out," insisted Tex.

"He'll *get* a lot of knocking out," shouted Doc, jumping up and down. "Dempsey will be the greatest champion that ever lived."

"You're sure, Doc, that he'll be next heavyweight champ?"

"Tex, it's a lead-pipe cinch."

"Then he should be willing to fight Willard for nothing."

"He should, but he won't," said Kearns, reacting like a man stabbed.

Tex reached for his hat. "It's a gamble, but maybe I could let you have expenses."

"What are you, Rickard, a promoter or a piker?" snorted Doc. "If you wanta get in on big things you gotta take chances. There's lots of other guys bidding for Jack. About all we're doing now is sitting around, listening to offers."

"But none of them have Willard, eh, Doc? What would Jack fight for?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

Rickard laughed. "I guess you've been reading French magazines, Doc, and have fancy figures on the brain. There is no use us talking until you sneeze the dust out of your head."

"It's fifty grand or nothing," insisted Kearns.

"Well, that's it, boys. It's nothing." Ignoring Kearns, Tex turned to Jack. "So long, Jack."

After he walked out Dempsey questioned his manager's judgment for the first time. "We could have fought for expense money. We would have made up for it later."

"Nuts, he's got Willard, but we got you, half of the biggest meal ticket he ever reached for. He'll be calling us up soon, you see if he don't."

Rickard did call up three days later, and this time Kearns met him in a restaurant. He told Tex, "I don't want to argue no more with you about dough. We'll take fifteen thousand for our end if you'll go ahead and announce the match."

"I ain't signed you guys yet."

"Well, you got my word on it."

"Why are you in such a hurry about my announcing it?" asked Tex suspiciously.

Doc Kearns put his head down. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed at his eyes. "It's on account of my mother," he

choked out. "Her birthday's this week and if she read in the papers that I was going to manage a guy fighting for the heavy title—well, Tex, this would be the best present I could give her."

Tex announced the fight next day. On seeing the newspaper story, Kearns rushed off, gurgling, to Rickard. "Okay, sucker," he told him, "now you can give us fifty grand for our end."

Tex blew his top.

"Why did you announce the match?" Kearns demanded. "You ain't gonna go back on your word, are you?"

"Why not? You went back on yours."

Kearns laughed lightly. "Yeah, but I never prance around posing like some honest John."

In the end the matter was settled in an unusual fashion. A jury of newspapermen was called in. After listening to Kearns's speech why it should be \$50,000 and Tex's spiel of why it should be no more than \$15,000, they set Dempsey's fee at \$27,500.

Tex chose Toledo as the site because of his old idea that more people would be attracted to a big bout "near the center of the population." Ohio had no boxing law, but Ad Q. Thatcher, who had been Toledo's mayor several times, obtained assurance for Rickard from Governor James M. Cox that the bout would not be interfered with.

The project started with a \$150,000 bankroll produced by Frank Flournoy, a cotton broker of Memphis, whom Tex appointed co-promoter. The date set was July 4.

As interest in the fight grew, Tex became convinced that Willard and Dempsey were going to draw the first million-dollar gate in sports history. No man to wrestle off a hunch, he instructed James McLaughlin, who had built his arenas at San Francisco and Reno, to construct him one with 80,000 seats near Maumee Bay, an inlet of Lake Erie, two miles from the city. It cost \$100,000.

He was justly proud of Jim McLaughlin's arena, which the New York *Sun* called "the most remarkable structure of wood ever erected for a sporting event." It had a small emergency hospital at one end, contained 1,750,000 feet of lumber, and included a special section, protected by barbed wire, for the ladies.

Dempsey and Kearns arrived on the scene late in May, and set up their camp a short distance from the arena. From the beginning

Dempsey trained like a dedicated man. On awaking each morning, Jack jumped into the water. Then he went for a ten-mile run, followed by Jack Kearns calling out encouraging words to him from the back seat of a limousine. For the rest of the day he engaged in other muscle-hardening exercises and brutally assaulted his sparring partners, knocking out at least one of them every day. On discovering considerable public interest in his boy's training routine, Kearns built a 500-seat grandstand at the camp and charged 50 cents a head admission.

Willard during the past three years had blown up into quite a blimp. Jess did most of his training in a rocking chair on the porch of his bungalow. On hearing of Willard's indifferent training schedule Kearns bet \$1,000 against \$10,000 that Dempsey would knock out the champion in the first round. Damon Runyon bet \$200 on the same proposition, and got fifteen to one.

There was an extraordinary number of stories published about the handling of the concessions at Toledo. This was because Tex sold most of these potentially profitable side lines to "Professor Billy" McCarney, the fight game's best anecdote teller. Each evening Professor Billy regaled the press with details of his adventures farming out the privilege of selling opera glasses, peanuts, lemonade, cigarettes, candy, sandwiches, and cushions.

Through a lapse of memory, he said, he had sold the lemonade franchise to two different hicks. Four days later, he was confronted by both suckers, but the Professor proved equal to the occasion.

"I sold you the pink lemonade concession," he told one. Turning to the other, he added, "I distinctly explained that you were buying the right to peddle the yellow lemonade."

McCarney's best story about the concessions involved Battling Nelson, who was in Toledo to comment (via the usual ghost writer) about the great battle for the *Chicago Daily News*. Like many another overfrugal chap, the old Battler had been clipped of his worldly possessions by women, and was unable to afford a hotel room. He was sleeping in a pup tent outside the arena.

During the last few days before the fight the temperature at Toledo soared to over 100 and remained there. Though invul-

nerable to pain, Nelson was far from immune to the heat. The night preceding the fight he jumped, garbed in his underwear, into a vat of the pink lemonade he had mistaken, in his overheated state of mind, for a swimming pool. Joe Humphreys, the announcer, always claimed that Rickard paid the concessionaire for the contaminated beverage on condition that it be poured forthwith into Lake Erie. But others who were there assert that the faithless lemonade man stealthily dipped out this eau de Battling Nelson to thirsty fans, making a double profit on the juice.

If so, he was the only concessionaire who did not lose his shirt on the day of the fight. Inexperienced ushers stopped the beverage venders from circulating freely. But boys selling water at 10 cents a cup outside the arena cleaned up. And nobody wanted peanuts with the thermometer bubbling up to 112 degrees. The sandwich man's stock fell apart and the ice-cream merchant's stock melted.

Troubles were stacking up all around Tex. The unbearable heat, day after day after day, was only the first of them. His own publicity, for instance, was kicking back at him. For come-on purposes, Ike Dorgan, Rickard's press agent, sent out word that the best seats were going fast. The public believed this, and was staying away. The sports writers also wrote much about the complete gouging job Toledo's hotels and restaurants were doing on all visitors, but predicted that there would not be a hotel room in Toledo on the night before the fight.

Most discouraging of all was the transportation situation. Though the war was over, the railroads were still being run by the Federal government, and Pullmans were in short supply. A series of railroad strikes threatened to strand thousands of fans on their way to the fight. General Hines, director of the railroads for the government, also kept canceling special excursion trains to Toledo. In the end, only one such train got off from New York.

The day before the fight, with his whole future depending on the success of his big show, Tex dropped over to Dempsey's camp. Going into Jack's dressing room, he waited until they were alone. Then he told him:

"Son, this Willard is a great fighter. I am worried about you because I am afraid he might kill you. He killed one man, you know."

"Yes," said Dempsey, "I know he did, Tex."

Rickard chewed on his cigar as he searched for the words he wanted to say next. He was very nervous as he went on:

"Well, here's what you do. You get in there and fight him the best you can. But if he hits you hard and hurts you a lot, and you think he is going to kill you, you just go down and stay down. Don't think about me. It will be all right with me. I don't want you to get killed."

To stagger the crowds, Rickard had announced that the first preliminary would go on at 10:30 in the morning, and that the ticket windows would open at six.

But there was no all-night line outside the arena as at other big sports events. By eight o'clock, though, there were an estimated 10,000 waiting to buy \$10 tickets. But downtown the speculators were reported tearing their hair and trying to peddle their choice \$60 locations on the street at half price. A blind man bought one of those, saying it was worth the money to him just to be in the middle of all the excitement.

The local streetcar company had arranged an all-expense excursion by trolley car and found itself stuck with thirty-eight unsold tickets—at \$25 each. An official was sent to the arena with these. Refused a refund, the streetcar man tried to sell the tickets for \$20 each in front of Tex's office. On seeing this, the irate Rickard sent out a Pinkerton man, who instructed a policeman to arrest the traction official for profiteering. The streetcar man made the reasonable argument that selling at cut rates was the opposite of profiteering, but the policeman insisted that he at least dispose of the tickets some place where the promoter could not see him.

One man bought a \$60 complimentary ticket for \$15, then decided at the last moment that his purchase might be a counterfeit. He brought it to Tex, told him how he got it, and asked, "Is it any good?"

As he tore the free ticket into small pieces, Tex said, "Yes, it was—but it isn't now."

The twelve-round championship fight was scheduled to start at 3:30 P.M. But by noon it became obvious that far less than half of the 80,000 seats were going to be sold. (After the fight Tex Rickard admitted the paid attendance had been less than 20,000

and the gross receipts \$452,522. He and Frank Flournoy had the biggest gate in history, yet a profit only on paper. Their actual expenses were \$315,000. But the government tax took \$40,000 and there had been an agreement to turn over 7 per cent of the gross receipts to the Toledo Charity Fund. This amounted to \$31,500. After taking care of the local politicians, Rickard and Flournoy ended up with a small loss. This even after they sold the arena to a contractor for \$25,000 cash.)

Inside the vast, steaming arena on that Fourth of July, the thousands of sweltering customers watched the preliminaries which started on schedule every half hour. Between bouts, there were events that would have excited any 1919 crowd if the weather had been endurable. Tex had hired a band. But the musicians couldn't play because their brass instruments blistered their hands. One overstimulated reporter said that the instruments melted, though the Wurlitzer Company, which manufactured them, later denied this. Throughout the day a U.S. Army Balloon Corps blimp sailed back and forth over the ring. A handsome young Army aviator, Lt. Ormer Locklear, startled the crowd by climbing from his plane, while in full flight, up a rope ladder to another plane flying above it.

As the day wore on, the crowd became hotter and more impatient. In the ladies' section even the usually imperturbable Ethel Barrymore looked angry and uncomfortable. Near her Mrs. Rickard was playing hostess to a party of her friends including Mrs. W. A. Gavin, the titled champion British woman golfer.

With the big fight fifteen minutes overdue, a cry of anguish rose when Maj. Anthony J. Drexel Biddle and a detachment of Marines stepped into the ring. They gave a totally unappreciated exhibition of bayonet and dagger fighting, under the supervision of the indefatigable Biddle. The Major was also acting as a judge of the fight. Rickard was the other judge; Warren Barbour, later United States Senator from New Jersey, was timekeeper; and a local man, Ollie Pecord, referee.

When the Marines finally departed there was another delay while a fresh canvas was laid in the ring. Willard had heard that the canvas from his opponent's training-camp ring was being used and demanded at the last moment that another be substituted. While this was being done, his handlers were watching Dempsey

wind yards of heavy bicycle tape around and around his fists, without protesting.

The fight was one of the most hair-raising ever seen. The men entered the ring a little after 4 P.M., Dempsey coming in first. He was wearing a sweater. With this off it could be seen that his body was covered with oil. Jack weighed 180 pounds and was in superb shape. Unshaven, he looked sullen and angry and fierce as he sat down in his corner under an umbrella held by a sparring partner. Willard, weighing 245, appeared a giant compared to the challenger. But he looked very flabby.

Many celebrities were introduced. Then referee Pecord called the men together and gave them their instructions. When they came out, Dempsey didn't use the cannon-ball attack that had got him this title chance. Instead, he slowly circled around the mammoth champion.

Willard hit him with two light lefts, and charged Dempsey into the ropes. Dempsey then swung with his left, hitting Willard so hard under the heart that his fist disappeared from sight in the big man's belly. Willard dropped his hands, and Jack hooked him with a right that broke Jess's cheekbone.

Willard went down like a shot elephant. The rules then permitted a fighter to stand over a fallen opponent. Dempsey did this and smashed Willard again to the floor the moment he got up. After that everybody had difficulty counting the knockdowns. They came that quickly. There were at least seven, though, and as the round ended Willard was again on the floor, this time unconscious.

Fantastically, the bell didn't ring. Kearns had his own time-keeper in his corner. He knew there were three seconds only left in the round when Ollie Pecord again started counting over Jess. This meant that the champion could not be counted out. But hungry to get the \$100,000 he would collect on a first-round knockout, Kearns attempted the maddest swindle of his life. On seeing that Pecord was still counting over Willard, he yelled in Dempsey's ear:

"Come on! Let's go! I win! I'm the champion. Let's get out of this mob." And with that he hustled Dempsey through the ropes. The whole place was in pandemonium. Only Warren Barbour, the



official timekeeper, kept his head. Looking behind the bell, he saw what had happened. A cord from the new ring canvas had slipped behind it, preventing the hammer from striking. Barbour found a whistle, and blew it. Hearing it above the din, the two Jacks raced down the aisle and climbed back into the ring. Pecord was an inexperienced home-town referee, or he would have disqualified Dempsey for leaving the ring before the fight was officially over. In the confusion, however, he permitted the fight to continue. That was the one reason Kearns's recklessness did not cost his man killer the title.

In the second round Willard took some more terrible punishment without once being able to hit the bobbing, weaving Dempsey. The champion's cheek was crushed, his ribs were broken, his face was a blue mass, and his eyes were almost closed at the bell.

The third round furnished the same unbelievable spectacle of the world champion being beaten as no world heavyweight champion had ever been before. And Jess refused to come out for the fourth. He ordered his seconds to throw in the towel, acknowledging defeat.

In the excitement that followed, Willard's seconds disappeared. Semiconscious, Cowboy Jess sat on his stool, nodding, peering out into the crowd as though seeking one friendly face in all that mob that was cheering so wildly for Dempsey.

Even if there had been a friendly face he would have had difficulty seeing it. His eyes were glassy. His right eye was a mere slit and his left looked like a puffed-up ball ready to pop out.

As Dempsey came over to shake hands, Willard got up, wobbling drunkenly, and kissed Jack on the forehead. Still unattended, he put a bloody towel over his head, climbed from the ring, and, like a blinded giant, sought the aisle. The blood was still trickling down his chin, and he sat down hard on a bench. When he got up, he was gasping, and his head was rolling from side to side.

Not a hand was stretched out to help him. On his way out he fell against the barbed wire of the women's section. Down another aisle, an exultant mob was carrying Dempsey on their shoulders to his dressing room.

But one young man, who had been struggling to reach Willard, finally fought his way to his side. He was Charles MacArthur,

then a twenty-three-year-old Chicago reporter, whose assignment was to interview Jess after the fight. He took him by the hand and led him down the aisle as though Jess were a child.

MacArthur heard Willard mumbling as they stumbled out. "I have \$100,000 and a farm in Kansas," the ex-heavyweight champion half sobbed. "I have \$100,000 and a farm in Kansas. I have. . . ."

# 13

## In a place touched by magic

IN 1920 the Walker Boxing Law legalized fifteen-round title bouts to a decision in New York. A little over two months later Tex Rickard took over Madison Square Garden. This was the old Garden, of course, which stood on the corner of the square for which it was named.

Tex and the Garden had much in common when they merged personalities. Each was forty-nine years old, and highly esteemed by sports fans. Both were head over heels in debt.

Since the Toledo fight Tex had been devoting some of his time to two propositions which eventually failed. One was the International Sporting Club which the English promoter William A. Gavin was trying to organize on the pattern of the famous National Sporting Club of London. The other was an oil company with wells in Texas which was financed by the floating of a 60,000-share stock issue with a \$5 par value.

Tex got many of his newspaper friends and others to invest, but when the stock soared to \$24 a share he urged them to sell out. By that time he had gone down to the field in Texas and found things being run there in a way not to his liking. When the stock dropped in value, Tex considered himself responsible for his

friends' losses. He stripped himself of cash, buying from them at the prices they had paid for it.

Even while broke Tex and Edith Mae continued to live lavishly—often on the cuff for months at a time—at the Biltmore Hotel. As always, Tex recognized his insolvency as purely temporary, and therefore unimportant.

But there was nothing temporary about the Garden's financial sorrows. The big town's showcase, forum, and sports arena had been losing money ever since anyone could remember. New Yorkers, almost without exception, loved the old place. But none of them, including J. P. Morgan, had been able to make it pay.

Rickard was well aware that the Garden had always been a white elephant. Yet he was exuberant when he signed a ten-year lease at \$350,000 a year. The party of the second part was the New York Life Insurance Company, which, not too long before, had foreclosed several long-term mortgages on the property. The company intended to tear down the Garden and build on its site a skyscraper office for its thousands of vice-presidents, file clerks, bookkeepers, actuaries, and salesmen. But there were so many outraged protests from the public, not to mention loud bleats of "Sacrilege!" and "Vandalism!" from the city's editorial writers, that the plan was postponed.

The company had underestimated the depth of the affection the city's people had for the old place. They loved it as they loved little else in their monstrous grab bag of a big town. Three generations of them had spent many of the best afternoons and evenings of their lives in the building at the northeast corner of Madison Square. And much of what they saw in that house of wonders great and small they never forgot.

The circus that came each spring with its clowns, prancing elephants, shapely girl bareback riders, trapeze artists, freaks, and acrobats was only the start. Almost every year there were also wild West shows, pageants, panoramas, concerts, athletic contests of every description, horse sales, horse shows, dog, cat, and poultry shows, toy fairs, bazaars; also, new inventions were often first shown there. In fact, each step in the breath-taking growth of city and country was mirrored at the Garden.

Originally the site had been occupied by the New York, New

Haven and Hartford's passenger and freight terminal. When the railroad moved its terminal to Grand Central Station, Pat Gilmore, the popular bandmaster, took it over for concerts, calling it Gilmore's Garden. Barnum leased the property for his "Congress of Nations and Colossal Equestrian Entertainment," which he displayed under torchlight. Moody and Sankey held revival meetings there before the name was changed to Madison Square Garden in 1879.

Buffalo Bill had ridden in the first of the three Madison Square Gardens. *H.M.S. Pinafore* was performed from the deck of a ship floating in the largest water tub ever built for any such frivolous purpose. French masked balls held there had been denounced as "shockingly lascivious" by New York clergymen. The Garden had been the scene of the first national horse show, which featured jackasses and dray horses along with thoroughbreds. For subsequent shows society women had their servants bring rugs, rocking chairs, and other furniture from their homes so they could view the riders and blue-blooded steeds from familiar and comfortable surroundings.

The first Garden was torn down in 1889. It was replaced the following year by a magnificent building, designed by Stanford White, America's foremost architect. This structure cost \$4,500,000, and occupied the entire block bounded by Madison and Fourth Avenues, 26th and 27th Streets. White constructed it of pale yellow brick decorated with white terra cotta. There was a colonnaded arcade over the Madison Avenue entrance which extended part way down the street on either side. America's largest entertainment building, it contained a great amphitheater and arena, an elegantly furnished theater and concert hall, a restaurant and lodge rooms. Two years later its roof garden was opened, and quickly became a favorite play spot and rendezvous for the town's elite.

The most admired feature of White's Madison Square Garden was its tower, which rose to a belfry 341 feet above the street. It was an adaptation of the Giralda Tower in Seville. On its belfry stood a 14-foot gilded copper figure of Diana, the work of Augustus St. Gaudens. The Goddess of the Chase was depicted nude to the waist and holding a bow and arrow. When the wind shifted, Diana revolved on her base, which contained forty large steel balls,

so that her arrow always pointed into the wind. Diana was a marvel but was denounced by the clergy, who feared the demoralizing effect her nudity might have on the always unstable morals of the younger generation.

Scandalous things were also whispered about the luxurious apartment Stanford White had reserved for himself high in the tower. This had all sorts of secret doors and sliding panels, and White had filled it with mirrored boudoirs, divans covered with leopard and tiger skins, naughty paintings and sculptures, tapestries portraying love bacchanals. He gave the wildest parties in town there for his millionaire clients and friends, with the prettiest chorus girls in the current Broadway musical hits for dinner companions.

The Garden's amphitheater was cavernous—300 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 60 feet high. The arched ceiling was supported by curved steel beams and had a sliding skylight. Its tiers of boxes, mezzanine floors, and galleries accommodated 7,000. But for fights, conventions, and other events at which spectators could be seated in the arena, the capacity was almost double that number.

Madison Square Garden's beauty and impressive dimensions made it one of the favorite showplaces of New York. And everything kept happening there, including the most sensational love murder in American history. This was, of course, the shooting at the roof garden on June 25, 1906, of architect White by Harry K. Thaw, the mad Pittsburgh playboy, over the love of his showgirl wife, Evelyn Nesbit.

Down through the years the mightiest voices in the land rocked Garden audiences with arguments for great causes. The Presidential candidates all displayed their charm and wit and eloquence on its platform: the galvanic Teddy, and William Jennings Bryan, whose voice was like melodious thunder, and ex-President Grover Cleveland, who chose the Garden when he announced he was yielding to the nationwide demand that he return to public life. There it was that ugly Samuel Gompers, the little cigar maker, vowed to lead America's workers out of their sweatshops, and John Alexander Dowie offered salvation to all who cared to follow him back to Zion City, Illinois. Henry George explained his Single Tax theory; Henry R. Grady told of the New South; Robert Inger-

soll attacked the teachings of the Bible in the same Madison Square Garden. You could teach there the old-time religion, preach revolution, or hold a square dance if you had the price of the hall for the night.

Nevertheless, most New Yorkers continued to think of the Garden primarily as an athletic arena. And it is difficult to remember a great champion who never appeared there, including all fistmen from the burly Boston strong boy, John L. Sullivan, down to Young Griffo, the will-o'-the-wisp from Australia, and the incomparable George Dixon. Frank Gotch, Hackenschmidt, George Bothner, Youssouf the Terrible Turk wrestled there. Attila supported 2,000 pounds on his chest to the delight of a Garden audience. Dorando and Johnny Hayes had rerun their classic Olympic marathon race there. The Garden also was the scene of six-day go-as-you-please walking contests, six-day bicycle races, swimming races in long canvas tanks, hurdle races, jumping contests. It all added up to thousands of days and nights fondly remembered.

And if the building itself seemed touched by magic, so did the old square on whose corner it stood. Though by 1920 the trend of the city was continuing uptown, the square was still the center of the city to millions of Americans. Not too long before, O. Henry, the quiet Southerner who was one of the best press agents New York ever had, acclaimed it also the center of the universe.

The heroes, heroines, and hobos in dozens of his stories sat on its park benches as they dreamed of sweeter tomorrows.

It had been social New York's favorite playground in the days when Delmonico's, the fabulous Fifth Avenue Hotel, the Café Martin, the Hoffman House, and Leonard Jerome's residence had been part of the square's glittering fringe.

By 1920, of course, most of these nineteenth-century buildings were gone. But swarms of out-of-towners continued to visit it each day. They wished to see with their own eyes the old Garden, now grimy and sad with age; the Fuller Building shaped like a flatiron; and the fast-crumbling plaster "Arch of Triumph" through which the World War I doughboys had paraded on their march up Fifth Avenue after the Armistice.

Few visitors, or New Yorkers, realized, though, that the square

itself could boast of a great athletic tradition: on its grass the gentlemen members of the Knickerbocker Club had played baseball in 1845 to the first set of rules ever written for the national game.

Before 1920 there had been but two brief periods when boxing in New York State was legal. The Horton Law between 1896 and 1900 permitted twenty-five-round bouts, and from 1910 to 1917, the Frawley Law allowed ten-round no-decision fights.

During the three years since the latter's repeal, many of the smaller New York clubs had tried to keep going under the guise of private organizations. Their promoters claimed that their weekly shows were for members only. In a fashion, these clubs were full-blown flowers of our democratic way of life. Anyone at all could join them merely by paying admission, though it was once rumored that Billy Gibson's snobbish Fairmont Club, in Harlem, was contemplating barring lepers. Token arrests were made occasionally, and modest fines paid, to shut up, or at least calm down, the indignant reform element.

William A. Gavin's proposed International Sporting Club, of course, was a far cry from this. Each member bought \$2,000 worth of the club's stock, which entitled him to two choice ringside seats at the club's boxing shows, and other privileges. But after building up a considerable membership, Gavin was advised that the courts would probably hold professional boxing shows illegal, even when staged in a private club.

Gavin went to James J. Walker, then Democratic leader of the New York Senate, and got him to write a boxing bill. Walker embodied in his bill the English system of having two judges, sitting on opposite sides of the ring, to vote on decisions along with the referee. It was Jimmy Walker's laudable theory that gamblers would find a fix more difficult to put in with three men than with one. This remains a laudable theory.

The Walker Law also provided for the appointment by the Governor of a three-man State Athletic Commission which would serve without pay and hold a tight rein on the sport. Boxers, promoters, managers, and even seconds would have to get licenses from the commission to stay in business. Unseemly behavior could



thus be penalized promptly by suspending or revoking the naughty gentleman's license.

Despite its lofty moral purpose, it took all of Jimmy Walker's boyish charm and beguiling manners to wriggle this bill through the State Legislature. And when the measure was submitted to his old friend and fellow-Tammanyite, Governor Alfred E. Smith, he ran into even tougher resistance.

Unlike the lighthearted ex-song writer Walker, Al Smith took his politics seriously. Professional boxing had always been one of his pet hates, for Smith bitterly resented the alliance between the Hall's ward heelers and the crooked gamblers who dominated the racket. He had built up a fine state political machine, and felt that boxing could seriously hurt it. Furthermore, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had just promised to present Al's name as New York's favorite son at the coming Democratic National Convention. Al couldn't see how reviving the boxing business could possibly help his chances of being nominated for the Presidency. He laughed when Walker pleaded that most of the state's decent citizens wanted boxing back.

"Do you mean by decent citizens, Jim," Governor Al asked, "those sluggers, tinhorn gamblers, and bums who have made their living from boxing ever since you and I can remember?"

Walker insisted that the Governor was listening to a handful of reformers instead of to the millions of working people who had voted for him.

"Okay, Jim," Al Smith told him. "If you can prove to me that the better element is behind your bill, I'll sign it. But to convince me of that you'll have to find one hundred clergymen who will write or wire me that they want boxing back."

A happy look lighted up the Senator's eyes. "Just a minute," said the Governor. "When I say clergymen, I don't mean our own Catholic priests whom you fool so easily with your line of baloney. And don't bother asking any Jewish rabbis either to write me. It's hardly a secret that the Jews of New York couldn't love you much more if your name was Eddie Cantor. Furthermore, I'll stand for no clowning. The letters have to be from duly ordained Protestant ministers. And I want all of those letters and wires on my desk by Monday. And this, James, is Friday."

"Easy as blowing foam off beer," said Senator Walker jauntily. As he walked out of the Executive Chambers, though, he stopped smiling. As Al Smith said, he could have got a hundred Catholic priests to petition the Governor, or a hundred rabbis. But the Protestant clergy was the backbone of the antiboxing faction.

On Monday morning Smith arrived at the Executive Mansion to find more than 600 wires and letters from Protestant clergymen piled up on his desk. All of these urged him to sign the Walker Boxing Bill without delay. And all proved to be bona fide.

"How did you do it?" asked the astonished Smith, when he next saw Walker. The Senator just grinned and said, "Thanks, Al, for making all of those good church people and myself happy by signing my bill so promptly."

Years later, while Mayor of New York, Jimmy told the inside story at a banquet of the New York Boxing Writers' Association. On getting back to his office that day he had recalled that Major A. J. Drexel Biddle, the millionaire Philadelphian who had led the Marines' bayonet and knife-fighting drill in the ring at Toledo, was head of a national Bible society. When he telephoned Biddle, who was as ardent a boxing fan as ever lived, the Major said he could solve the problem with no trouble at all.

"I'll just wire the New York headquarters of my Bible society to tell the members to write or telegraph the Governor," he said.

"But will the clergymen do it, Major?" asked Walker.

"Oh, I imagine so," said Major Biddle, lightly. "You see, I just donated a half-million dollars to the organization, and they are all very obliging and congenial people."

Tex, of course, was not the only promoter eager to get the famous old barn. All of the pros realized that 1920 might prove *the* year a man could start accumulating a million bucks running boxing at the Garden. With the war over, people seemed eager to relax and have a good time, despite the bad joke of Prohibition.

The Armed Services, surprisingly, had developed almost no top-notch ring men. Gene Tunney, a notable exception, was several years away from his peak.

Nevertheless there were more fighters of boxing and slugging ability around at the start of the twenties than ever before. Many

of them had been encouraged to become professionals by the record-breaking purses Tex Rickard had been paying.

To a promoter one of the most pleasing developments in New York was the large number of crowd-pleasing Jewish and Italian scrappers in action. All of the good Jewish and Italian fighters had a ferociously partisan following. This was particular true of Benny Leonard, the world lightweight champion, an East Side boy. Whenever Benny fought, hundreds of fans from his old neighborhood arrived in buses covered with banners proclaiming their allegiance. They blew horns, rattled cowbells, and yelled themselves hoarse. Johnny Dundee, who was called "the Scotch Wop," and other fighters also pulled large delegations of admirers.

Jimmy Johnston, who had clipped Tex for \$15,000 plus for one night's rental of the Garden for the Willard-Moran fight, was probably the man Tex had in mind when he told Jack Dempsey some years later: "I never saw the fierce competition anywhere that I did in New York when I was trying to promote my first shows here. Those fellers in high collars could get my goat any time. Long before I was a gambler I had to learn to take chances. That was back in my cowpunching days. There and in the Yukon you had to take chances just to stay alive.

"But sometimes I think these New York city fellers I'm talking about were tougher than any wild-eyed killer or any of the gun-toting boys I lived with in the old days. Other times I got the hunch that they might turn out after a while to be nothin' more than a lotta drugstore cowboys."

Yet it was Tex Rickard, the outsider, who ended up with the all-important lease on the Garden. His backer was John Ringling, the circus man, who was anxious to keep competing three-ring shows out of that showplace.

Tex put on his opening show at the Garden September 17 with Joe Welling, the Chicago lightweight, and Johnny Dundee, a light puncher who had the crowd-pleasing trick of bouncing off the ropes and assaulting his opponent with rights and lefts while on the fly, in his main event. But Johnny lost this one. Welling won, and the crowd liked the fight and liked even more Tex's handling of the arrangements. He had painted and decorated the Garden, polished the floor and chairs, and cleaned up generally. Best of all,

he had ushers who neither looked nor acted like brigands and led you to the seat, clearly marked, that your ticket called for.

During the seven years he was champion, Jack Dempsey fought only twice for other promoters. The first time was at Benton Harbor, Michigan, against Billy Miske, September 6, 1920. The fight, won by Dempsey with a knockout in the third round, drew \$134,903, of which the champion got \$55,000 and Miske \$25,000. The peculiar story behind this promotion was that Miske was a sick man who needed hospital money desperately. Many of the writers who covered the battle commended Dempsey highly for knocking out Billy as quickly and humanely as possible.

Before this bout Dempsey had signed to fight K.O. Bill Brennan for Rickard at the Garden. Brennan, the heavyweight whom Dempsey hit so hard on the chin in their previous fight that he broke Brennan's ankle, seemed to present less of a problem than Billy Miske. In fact, during the previous year he had dropped decisions to Miske and Harry Greb.

The Dempsey-Brennan fight drew \$208,000 of which Jack got \$100,000—and the surprise of his life. Dempsey had been doing theatrical work and did not train properly. The 16,000 fans who jammed the Garden saw the great Mauler punched silly for eleven rounds. Jack later said that Brennan in the second round had caught him with a rock-crushing right to the chin and he had been out on his feet until the twelfth, when his head cleared long enough for him to get up the steam to belt out Brennan. But it was a close one, and the man-killer from Manassa never again made the mistake of under-rating an opponent.

The manner in which this disappointing showing by Dempsey enabled Tex to clean up on Jack's next fight is another good example of how Lady Luck stayed with Rickard like a faithful old sweetheart.

# 14

## The Rickard masterpiece

AFTER the 1918 Armistice, Georges Carpentier, Europe's most famous prize fighter, emerged as the leading contender for Dempsey's crown. He has justly been called the most artificially built-up heavyweight contender in ring history. He was also the smallest, as he weighed about 170 for most of his bouts.

Nevertheless, millions of fans in the United States, in his own country, and throughout the British Empire considered him the man best qualified to take Jack's championship from him. This extraordinary optimism was based more on Georges's war achievements rather than on his spotty ring record.

Carpentier, a slim, charming, and graceful young man, had just spent four years in his country's service. He had been decorated twice for flying a reconnaissance plane less than 200 yards above the German lines, and had been wounded twice by enemy shrapnel, once in the foot and once in the head.

Above all, Georges was French, and during the worldwide build-up of him—which lasted from 1919 to 1921—more Americans loved the French than ever before or since. Two million doughboys back from the war to end all wars could talk of little else but the French wine they had drunk, the French girls they'd

kissed, the gallantry and courage of their French brothers-in-arms. The stay-at-homes meanwhile had been singing a hundred and one sentimental ballads and humorous songs about the Yanks' adventures over there; everything from "Joan of Arc" through "How You Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Paree)?" to "Don't Cry, Frenchy, Don't Cry."

Carpentier's stock as a scrapper zoomed when, on taking off his uniform, he knocked out a few European stumblebums. The most publicized of these victories was over Joe Beckett, the British heavyweight champion. Beckett was just another in a long line of England's slow-moving, glass-jawed heavyweight morning-glories. But the bout, which Carpentier won with a first-round knockout, had been built up as a battle between fistic marvels. The Prince of Wales was there, and it had been covered by George Bernard Shaw.

Following this easy success, Georges boxed an exhibition for King George and Queen Mary, then triumphantly toured the Scandinavian countries. He was greeted rapturously along the way by King Gustav of Sweden and other regal personages.

In the spring of 1920 Georges married a well-born French girl of twenty-two. They visited New York on their honeymoon, accompanied by his manager, M. François Descamps, a trainer, a maid, a secretary, and thirty-five trunks. No one in Carpentier's party could speak much English, and many reporters wrote about his wardrobe, which included, they said, 75 suits, 100 silk shirts, 20 overcoats, 4 fur coats, 1 fur robe, and 75 pairs of shoes. Despite the language handicap (few reporters in New York spoke or understood French in that dark era of American journalism), Carpentier's secretary managed to convey that, besides being a great pugilist, Georges was one of the best billiard players in Europe, a fine golfer and tennis player, a gifted motorist, and a superb ballroom dancer.

During the fall, Carpentier, as part of the build-up for a Dempsey fight, knocked out Battling Levinsky, the world light heavyweight champion, in the fourth round, at Jersey City. Sports writers denounced this fight as a fake. One of these spoilsports also called attention to the coincidence of gamblers cleaning up a

fortune betting on the Frenchman knocking out the Battler in precisely the round he did. As usual both contestants issued statements saying they had fought their best. Carpentier said he was willing to pledge his honor as a citizen and soldier of France that Levinsky had not laid down.

This controversy, and experts' opinions that Carpentier showed nothing in Jersey City to indicate he had a chance against the cruel-punching Dempsey, failed to discourage public interest in such a bout. Promoters in London, Montreal, and Tia Juana, Mexico, offered large purses for the match, though Tex Rickard had the exclusive contract for Jack Dempsey's services in his next fight. On learning that Charles B. Cochran, the English theatrical producer, had a similar contract with Carpentier, Tex formed a partnership with him and William A. Brady, the Broadway play producer, who was Cochran's American representative. As a young man, Brady had managed two world heavyweight champions, Corbett and Jeffries, and had promoted title bouts at Coney Island. He was credited with knowing as much about the fight business as anyone alive.

Having very little loose capital at the moment, Rickard welcomed both men as equal partners. But their preliminary dickerings with Doc Kearns and Carpentier's manager, François Descamps, came to an abrupt end when that pair made their demands. Descamps, who knew even less English than his fighter, had Jack Curley interpreting for him.

On discovering the money guarantee the principals wanted, Tex almost fainted. Cochran headed for the door. "How do you get out of this place?" he exclaimed. "I really must be getting back to London." He consented to remain only after Brady whispered to him that the two managers must be bluffing.

"Unless they are demented," said Cochran, gloomily.

Kearns asked \$300,000 plus 25 per cent of the movie rights for the champion. Descamps, through Curley, said he would accept less because his Georges was merely the challenger—all he wanted was \$200,000 plus 25 per cent of the movie rights.

Brady pointed out that they were demanding more money than any fight had ever grossed. That made Kearns yawn. After many

hours of wrangling, Brady cried out in anguish, "Bring in your two fighters. Old as I am, I'll take them on myself, one at a time, for a half-million dollars."

Snearing at this theatrical outburst, Doc departed. When Curley translated Brady's words, Descamps left also.

A couple of days later Tex made Doc and Descamps a counter-offer of 60 per cent of the gross receipts. Tex suggested that three-fifths of this, or 36 per cent of the gross, go to Dempsey, the rest to the challenger. Doc gave this offer the deaf ear, while M. Descamps replied that, though he had enjoyed his conversations greatly with M. Rickard, M. Cochran, and M. Brady, he and Carpentier had booked passage back to their beloved France and would be leaving on November 6.

Shortly after that Rickard walked into his favorite New York restaurant to find Doc Kearns at a table with two swarthy strangers. Their faces looked familiar, though Tex could not place them. He asked the headwaiter who they were.

"They are old friends of Mr. Kearns, sugar and tobacco millionaires from Cuba," he was told. "Mr. Kearns told me they came up here to sign a contract with him for the big fight."

Rickard paled. Disconsolately he watched Doc chatting, rubbing his hands together and nodding. The next morning he, Cochran, and Brady resumed their talks with Doc and Descamps.

On November 5, the day before the Frenchmen were to sail for home, the contract for the big fight was signed by the three promoters, the two managers, two fighters, and Bob Edgren, who was to act as stakeholder. This paper stated that Dempsey would be paid \$300,000, Georges \$200,000. The agreement also stated that on or before November 20 the three promoters must post \$100,000, and the managers \$50,000 each in forfeit money, at the Central Trust Company of New York.

On his way home Tex stopped at a bar to have a drink with Doc Kearns. "Who was them Cuban sugar millionaires I seen you with the other day, Doc?" Tex asked. "Their faces sure looked familiar."

Doc roared. "They *should* look familiar, Tex. They're waiters who have been working your table at the Biltmore ever since you



started to eat there. I figured if I dressed them up in new suits and shoved big cigars in their kissers you'd never recognize them."

Kearns lost no time in telling everyone he met of how he had bluffed Tex into signing the \$500,000 deal. When a sports writer asked him whether he felt that squared the score for him with the promoter, he slapped his knee.

"It squares it, sure—till the bell rings for our next round."

But on November 20, the date set for the posting of the guarantee and forfeit money, it looked as though he would have to fight the round he had won all over again.

The promoters were supposed to post equal shares of their \$100,000 guarantee, but only Cochran was able to do so on November 20. Both managers had also broken the agreement involuntarily. Kearns deposited the champion's \$50,000 in some financial institution, but it was not the Central Union Trust Company. It turned out later that Doc had popped the money into a safe-deposit box by mistake. Meanwhile he had returned to California, and could not immediately be located. As for Descamps, he was stopped by the French government from sending here Georges's \$50,000, or any part thereof. Paris said it was too short of moolah itself to permit any such chunk of money to leave the country.

Rickard and Brady had failed to raise their shares of the \$100,000 because of threats Governor-Elect Nathan L. Miller had made to repeal the Walker Law. And Mr. Miller, a Republican, who had been elected that month in the 1920 landslide that swept Warren G. Harding into the White House, was assuming office on January 1.

The promoters had counted heavily on putting the fight on at one of the big New York ball parks, thus eliminating the cost of an arena. The idea of building one, after gambling \$500,000 on the purse, scared off the backers Tex and Bill Brady had approached. Brady withdrew, using the excuse that the fighters' forfeit money had not been delivered on time, and Cochran also pulled out of the deal shortly afterward.

Rickard, however, insisted he would go through with the match. "I'll put this fight on alone if I have to," he told the sports writers.

"I feel duty-bound to do that. And this one will be the best and biggest fight I ever promoted. Dempsey's poor showing against Brennan made it a ten times better match than it was before. Why, I can name you forty or fifty men who are willing to jump in and take Brady's and Cochran's place."

But he did not name these eager backers. Nor did he explain where he was going to get more than a half-million dollars so soon after being unable to scare up his third of the forfeit money.

News of the fizzle of his big financial squeeze play brought Doc Kearns racing across the country. Tex, Jack Curley, and he started a new series of conferences. These lasted for hours, and continued for weeks, with everyone talking in circles.

The dickering was still going on when Rickard, to his delight, suddenly found himself tossed headfirst into the *crème de la crème* of New York society. This happened when Anne Morgan, daughter of one J. P. Morgan and sister of another, asked him to donate the Garden for a night to her favorite charity, The American Friends of France.

On hearing that a championship fight would raise more money than any other sports attraction, Miss Morgan agreed to act as co-promoter. Rickard got her the most promising match in sight, Richie Mitchell versus Benny Leonard for the world lightweight title. For publicity purposes, the articles for this match were signed in the Morgan family's Madison Avenue mansion, which for the first and last time welcomed fight guys smoking ill-smelling cigars.

The fight drew the sort of high-hat-and-ermine crowd Tex had dreamed for years of luring to one of his fights. The scrap proved one of the great all-time thrillers in lightweight history. After knocking down Mitchell three times in the first round, Leonard was dropped himself by a roundhouse wallop. He staggered to his feet just in time to save his championship, and went on to win with a sixth-round knockout. The bout drew \$162,388, and set a new box-office record for all weight classes except heavyweights.

Three weeks after this bout, Tex posted the \$100,000 promoter's bond for the Dempsey-Carpentier match, and announced officially that he had taken over Brady's and Cochran's interest. Tex smilingly declined to name his new angel as yet, and said he had

no idea where he would stage the battle, or get the money he would need to promote it.

But shortly afterward Tex confided to the sports writers he trusted that Mike Jacobs, the Broadway ticket speculator, had advanced him \$160,000 for the bond and other preliminary expenses. He also said that reservation orders, accompanied by money orders and checks, had begun to flow into his office on the day he announced that he'd positively put on the fight. He was using that money, he said, to finance his other expenses.

"Pretty flattering, ain't it, boys," said Tex, "that people all over should have such faith in my word? And I ain't even said yet where I will put it on. But I guess it will be in New Jersey somewhere, Newark, Atlantic City, or maybe Jersey City."

"When the district attorney finds out about your financing arrangements he isn't gonna like it at all," Jimmy Dawson of the *Times* told him. "And, oh boy, Tex, would the D.A. like to make himself a big shot by grabbing you!"

Tex grinned. Ever since the war ended the papers had been running stories about what New York officials were going to do to Broadway ticket speculators who gouged the public. Tex had not been able to find out why these same officials were less interested in the current rent profiteering by landlords all over town. That ran into millions a month, and affected rich and poor alike.

"Well, I ain't aiming to tell the D.A. nothing about it for quite a spell," said the promoter. "So unless you boys go and put it in your papers he won't hear about it, will he?"

"Until the day of the fight," said W. O. McGeehan years later, "I kept wondering what in the world Tex would do if anything happened to either Dempsey or Carpentier."

Some weeks before the bout Tex did insure both men for \$50,000 each, but this represented only a fraction of the money he would have had to refund if the bout was canceled.

No fight ever attracted the global attention that one did. Every move the fighters or Tex made was front-page news. When Tex decided the bout would go on at 3 P.M. on July 2, 1921, his announcement was cabled around the world. When he finally chose Boyle's Thirty Acres, Jersey City, as his site one might have

thought that another Battle of Gettysburg was to be decided there. The Boyle of the Thirty Acres, by the way, was a paper-box manufacturer who owned the property jointly with a local public utility. Even he became a celebrity for a while.

Wishing to avoid his Toledo mistake of overbuilding, Tex ordered merely a 50,000-seat stadium. But as reservations kept flooding in, he increased the capacity, first to 70,000, then again to 91,613.

When the first batch of tickets went out they created a sensation. They were oversized, beautifully engraved, and had embossed gold backs. Rickard's hunch was that they'd be shown around by everyone who bought them, giving the fight that much more free word-of-mouth advertising. He also knew that many fans who paid up to \$50 for a ticket might like them for souvenirs. Tex knew he would, and, as always, worked on the theory that there were millions of other men who wanted to do, see, and have whatever he did. Today, more than thirty-five years after that fight, you can find these same tickets (minus stubs, of course) lying in the bureau drawers of old fans in every part of the country. Some even had these beautiful pasteboards and those to Tex's other famous fights framed.

Dempsey made sure he wouldn't be out of condition, as he had been for the Brennan fight, by training weeks before Carpentier sailed from France. He started his preparations at Summit, New Jersey, but shortly afterward shifted them to an abandoned airport near Atlantic City.

Meanwhile the construction of the arena, which was shaped more like a saucer than a bowl, was being given more space than newspapers had ever devoted to describing Versailles, the Taj Mahal, and the Great Wall of China combined.

The arrival of Georges Carpentier on May 16 generated more excitement. This time the Gorgeous One was accompanied by M. Descamps, Paul Journée, a 220-pound sparring partner; Charles Ledoux, the bantamweight champion of France; Gus Wilson, his trainer and masseur; Marco, his chef; and his little dog, Flip. There was a regrettable delay at the pier when Georges learned that the customs inspectors intended to place Flip in quarantine for several days.

An exception was hastily made when the Orchid Man, through Jack Curley, announced he would call off the fight rather than be deprived of the companionship of his dog.

It has long been Paul Gallico's pet theory that a good deal of Rickard's success as a promoter was the result of his ability to make the public see one fighter as a hero and the other as a villain. In the impending imbroglio that had already been done for him.

In Carpentier he had his custom-made hero. On the other hand, factions in the newly established American Legion and other patriotic groups had painted Dempsey a villain of blackest hue. They branded him a slacker, and some of them urged that the big fight be barred on that ground.

The agitation against Dempsey had started during the war. One day he was photographed working as a shipyard riveter, and an alert sports writer noticed that he was wearing patent-leather shoes. The fact that a shipyard official had asked Jack to do this in the hope of attracting much-needed workers helped Dempsey not at all. The story highlighted the fact that the Manassa mankiller was not in uniform with millions of his fellow Americans.

But the furor over this was dying down when Maxine Cates, Jack's divorced wife, wrote to the San Francisco *Chronicle*, saying that she had no less than thirty-five letters from Jack boasting of the clever way he had evaded the draft. She also charged that he had improperly listed her as a dependent in 1917 when he applied for exemption, though she had supported him on her earnings.

On February 26, 1920, a Federal Grand Jury in San Francisco indicted Dempsey on a charge of filing false answers with his draft board. Kearns was also indicted in connection with this charge.

After sending the letter to the *Chronicle* Mrs. Dempsey vanished from Ely, Nevada, where she had again been living. But the government soon found her and brought her to San Francisco to testify against Jack. What he actually wrote her was not revealed, as the court ruled his letters to be inadmissible.

Maxine Cates Dempsey, a pretty, delicate-looking brunette, described on the stand what she herself called "her life of shame."

Under cross examination, she admitted that Jack had sent her money regularly during 1917, a year in which his ring earnings had been under \$4,000. She could not remember the amount, but guessed it had been about \$900. Jack later told reporters it was at least twice that much.

Dempsey's mother was his most effective defense witness. Mrs. Celia Dempsey had worked hard all of her life, and looked it. With burning sincerity, she told the story of what Jack's financial help had meant to her large family since he left home at fourteen. Ever since, she said, he had contributed every cent he could spare, and she did not know how she and her illness-ridden family could have managed without his help. Right after winning the title, she said with pride, Jack had bought her and his father a \$20,000 home in Salt Lake City.

Another important witness for the champion was Navy Lieutenant J. F. Kennedy, attached to the Great Lakes Naval Station. He told how Jack had pleaded with him to secure a release from his draft board so he could enlist. But the Armistice had ended all enlistments before this could be arranged.

After being out ten minutes, the jury returned a verdict of "Not guilty." The charges against Doc Kearns were dropped.

People remembered the draft-dodging charges against Jack, but not his exoneration. Their resentment lasted through the seven years he held his title, resulting in the paradox of the ring's greatest crowd-pleaser and box-office attraction's also being the most unpopular heavyweight champion that ever lived.

"They called me a bum before I was champion," says Jack, "and afterwards."

The atmosphere at the old airport where he trained for Gorgeous Georges, the Orchid Man and the French Ambassador of Swat, as Carpentier came to be variously nicknamed, did nothing to discourage the impression that Jack, Doc, and their friends were very low-life types indeed.

Kearns opened *his* headquarters in a sleazy hotel on the Atlantic City Boardwalk. The management of this joint believed in letting the guests misbehave to their hearts' delight. One of Dempsey's brothers ran a crap game in the lobby. Ladies of the evening

worked three shifts a day there. Doc's suite became the drinking capital of the Eastern seaboard, and a gathering place for footloose rowdies in all income brackets, sports writers, and show people with easygoing ways. Jack White, the comic, who spent the rest of his life running the riotous Club 18 in New York, was head professional hell-raiser.

Nightly the gang adjourned to Child's all-night restaurant, to throw pancakes at the waiter, crown baldheaded men with cantaloupe and pats of butter, and do convincing imitations of the Al Capone gang at play. They were welcome there, until one of them socked a waitress.

The cutups' rowdiness crashed the front pages when two of them tried to get into a Boardwalk cabaret, the Moulin Rouge, at four o'clock one morning. When the doorman refused to admit them, one of two lads pulled a switch-blade knife and charged inside, followed by his companion. They hit the headwaiter with a large vase, also knocked down and badly hurt a girl entertainer with a flying chair. Though a few of the male guests stood up to give battle, most of them dived under the tables while the girls with them fainted, or scrambled for the sanctuary of the powder room.

Taken into custody, the two scalawags asserted they were members of Dempsey's staff. Detectives went out to the airport to investigate. Others interviewed Doc Kearns, who was torn between the desire to get off the hook and a strong distaste for blowing the whistle on anyone. He finally told the coppers that the men were not "officially" on the champion's staff.

When Jack learned of this he stormed into Kearns's bedroom, where he found Doc dousing his coat lapels with expensive perfume. They had such a noisy quarrel that rumors got around that they'd broken up their partnership.

Sports writers found the camp deserted that day, and reported that the place had been closed by the police, something denied vociferously later by both Jacks.

Nothing could have furnished more contrast than the fancy Dan-high society atmosphere surrounding the French challenger's camp at Manhasset, Long Island, where Georges and his ménage were quartered on a small estate Curley had rented for them.

Rickard has often been given credit for inflating Carpentier's importance as a ring man. It was a magnificent bit of sustained ballyhoo work, but Jack Curley was responsible for a good deal of it.

Curley, an Alsatian born in California, had spent much of his boyhood in France. He was a true cosmopolite, and a far more versatile showman than Tex. In his time, Curley managed the tours of wrestling troupes, the Vatican Choir, Mrs. Lydia Pankhurst, the militant British suffragette leader; and Annette Kellerman, the swimmer. Curley, a thick-lipped, round-faced, lovable man, designed the one-piece bathing suit that made Miss Kellerman's figure the most talked-about feminine torso of the day. Curley, of course, had also promoted the Johnson-Willard fight in Havana, and the heavyweight championship wrestling match between Frank Gotch and George Hackenschmidt which drew \$94,000, which for years remained tops for such catch-as-catch-can soap operas.

Tex Rickard was captivated by an old story that Georges's manager, M. Descamps, possessed the hypnotic eye. At the beginning, it was said that this gentleman, an extraordinarily excitable little man, had used mysterious powers only to transport his own boy into a spellbound state in which he fought harder. But after being knocked out by the Orchid Man, both Bombardier Wells and Champion Joe Beckett alibied themselves with stories that Descamps had unfairly employed his mystical orb to reduce their resistance.

"I felt uneasy with that man staring at me each time I fought Carpentier," said the Bombardier. "I also felt queer all over," said Beckett, "even before Carpentier landed his first blow."

Unfortunately, the record showed that Georges, aided or not by his manager's hypnotic eye, had not fared well against many competent opponents, particularly when they were Americans.

The son of a coal miner in Lens, he had started his training for the ring under M. Descamps as a little boy. Descamps, a conjurer, hypnotist, and mind reader at traveling shows and fairs, also gave physical-culture lessons. Many a time the small Carpentier helped Descamps, in his mind-reading and conjuring specialties, to get



them both eating money. Their relationship was more like one of father and son than anything else.

When Georges was only thirteen, Descamps brought him to Paris for his first four-round bout. Despite occasional setbacks, Carpentier, as he got older and heavier, fought his way to all French titles up to the light-heavyweight division.

But the American scrappers, because of their more efficient and intense training and emphasis on speed, continually gave him trouble. At sixteen, for example, Georges won the French welterweight title, only to be knocked out two months later by Dixie Kid, the Negro welter. The following year, 1912, he fouled out to another American, Frank Klaus. This bout was advertised as a world middleweight title match, though Jimmy Clabby, Mike Gibbons, Eddie McGoorty, Jack Dillon, and George Chip at the moment were all loudly proclaiming themselves champion. Later in the same year, Billy Papke, another middleweight from the States, battered Gorgeous Georges dizzy in seventeen savage rounds.

Again and again Carpentier's important battles ended in fouls. This was often due to nervousness on the part of the manager who loved him like a son. When M. Descamps saw his Georges getting clobbered, he seldom could resist the temptation to jump into the ring yelling "Foul!"

During the two years before World War I Carpentier won from Gunboat Smith on a foul, was badly whipped by Joe Jeannette, won again on a foul from Kid Jackson in Bordeaux. Once, in Switzerland, he was disciplined for performing poorly. However, his later feats as a war flier obscured all that. And since being demobilized the Orchid Man had knocked out the six opponents he had faced. After his dubious victory over Levinsky, Georges discreetly had kept himself in dry dock, waiting for the big shot at Dempsey.

Some writers predicted that the spirit of Lafayette, as well as the Descamps eye, would inspire Gorgeous Georges in the ring at Boyle's Thirty Acres. Others said he could win only if Dempsey was hit by lightning during the fight.

On traveling out to Manhasset to see the wonderful Frenchman

train, the sports reporters were distressed to find state troopers, barbed-wire fences, and other press repellents all about Carpentier's camp. They were additionally outraged because eminent society figures including Vincent Astor and William H. Vanderbilt were being welcomed.

M. Descamps assumed full responsibility for this cruelty to journalists. With the bemused Jack Curley doing the interpreting, he explained that only a few of them could be admitted even on the three days of the week that Carpentier was in the mood to box.

Some of the newspapermen climbed trees to get a peek at Georges at his bag punching, shadowboxing, and rope skipping. Sid Mercer, the Hearst sports writer, complained in one dispatch of having had to disguise himself as a gardener to get past the state troopers.

There were obvious disadvantages to this highhanded handling of the press. It suggested that the real reason for the hush-hush might be that Carpentier wasn't very good. And once, when his 220-pound sparring partner, Journée, tripped in the ring, grabbed Georges in falling, and dragged him to the canvas with him, the reporters wrote that Journée had knocked him out. This, of course, was the same tale other ink-stained wretches had sent back about Jim Corbett after he barred them from his secret workout with Jim Jeffries. Rickard's press agent, Ike Dorgan, had to counter fast with stories about a secret punch the challenger was developing.

The twenties had begun in earnest, and the mad idea that a fairly frail 170-pounder could smack down Dempsey was right in tune with the crazy times. Moralists were worrying over women smoking and bobbing their hair, the lost generation, Greenwich Village parties, but not about U.S. Attorney General Palmer's Red witch hunts and the rebirth and rapid growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the South.

There was more than a little snobbery behind the nationwide idolatry of the Orchid Man. Long Island society had taken him to its flat bosom.

Another greatly beloved young man, Edward, Prince of Wales, was being hero-worshiped and partied all the way from Montauk Point to the Queens borough line. Gorgeous Georges and the heir apparent met at a boring social function and escaped together to

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a roadside tavern where they got stewed in the more humble but less frostbitten surroundings they found there.

The next morning Curley visited the French fighter. Observing that endless sedatives, purgatives, and headache remedies were being rushed up to the Orchid Man's room, he followed to warn him of the weakening power of such drugs. He found the Prince with Georges. Rolling home, arm in arm, each of the famous young men had offered to sleep on the floor so the other could use the bed. They argued about this so long that, in the end, they both became exhausted and fell asleep on the floor.

Rickard and Curley did not permit M. Descamps to carry too far his policy of having Gorgeous Georges hobnob only with the rich white society folks. On Decoration Day they had him pay a reverent visit to the grave of Theodore Roosevelt. They also got him to display himself at fights in Brooklyn and Jersey City.

The plugging of the Descamps hypnotic-eye angle continued right up until ring time. In one issue the Paris newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* jocularly suggested that in the interest of fair play to Dempsey, Descamps should be compelled to wear opaque motor-ing goggles "through which the malevolent emanations are unable to pass."

When Dempsey was asked how he expected to cope with Descamps' occult powers, he looked down at his fists and said, "I guess I'll have to depend on these."

Big and often insincere noises in the ballyhoo kept coming from the experts. Some of them, without even being slipped any money, rode along with the running gag that Carpentier had a good chance against Dempsey. Joe Choynski called it a toss-up. Referee Billy Roche picked Carpentier, saying he was big enough to beat anyone alive. Jim Corbett highly praised the Frenchman's flashy right hand. This last may not have helped the build-up. Gentleman Jim had guessed wrong on so many fights that he was beginning to get a reputation as the man who hadn't picked a winner since the first battle of Bull Run.

Dan McKetrick, who had seen Gorgeous Georges in some of his most inglorious moments in the ring, was quoted as grimly warning Dempsey not to underestimate the lightninglike striking power of Carpentier's right. The New York *World* ran a story

written by a scientist who declared that Carpentier had a great advantage over Jack because his muscles were long, not spherical like the champion's. The scientist's point was that long muscles possessed far greater punching power. On June 23, as though to confirm this, Carpentier knocked out all three of his sparring partners.

"For the first time in my life, boys," Tex gratefully told the sports writers one day, "I am being glutted by free publicity."

By the middle of June the advance sale passed \$600,000. By the twenty-fourth, it was more than \$800,000. Three days later Tex announced that his old dream of a million-dollar gate was about to come true. To avoid the costly mistake he had made at Toledo, he quickly added that more than \$500,000 worth of seats in all price ranges were still available.

On June 29, Tex handed Jack Kearns and Descamps the shock of their lives by announcing he would pay their fighters the straight \$500,000 purse, instead of the 36 per cent for Dempsey and 24 per cent for Carpentier deal which was his alternative. After the fight, when the last nickel was counted, it became clear that each fighter would have been paid almost twice as much if Kearns and Descamps had accepted the original straight 60 per cent offer. Kearns has never been able to live down this costly mistake, nor forgive Rickard for profiting by it.

Promotionally this fight was Tex Rickard's masterpiece. Two weeks before the fight the Jersey City commissioner of safety predicted that 80,000 would attend, and 40,000 additional persons would visit Jersey City just to be near the excitement. To handle these vast crowds, Mayor Hague's Police Department assigned 600 uniformed men to the inside of the arena, and 200 more to the streets outside, besides 160 detectives. There were also to be hundreds of firemen present. And it was decided to set up a quadrilateral barrier to prevent all persons without tickets from approaching within four blocks of any side of the arena.

After studying the figures, Tex asked the city officials to bring in at his expense hundreds of policemen and detectives from New York and other cities to augment the local constabulary.

Rickard hired 1,147 employees of his own, including hundreds of neatly dressed ushers. On each ticket Tex printed the number of

the gate through which the holder must enter. He started the preliminary bouts at noon to avoid bottlenecks in the tubes under the river, the ferries above it, and the various roads, trolley, bus, and railroad lines bringing his customers to the fight. All these are routine details of any big fight promotion today. But many of them were originally devised for the comfort of the public by Tex and the men who worked with him at Jersey City.

Some days before the fight the New York police raided a cellar and discovered there a printing press and other paraphernalia being used to manufacture counterfeit tickets for the fight. This inspired Rickard to arrange with the plant that printed his tickets to send over to the fight twenty veteran lithographers and engravers. These men would be stationed near the various entrances and would pass judgment on any pasteboards the ticket takers suspected were phonies.

Tex publicized this, together with the fact that he had offered law-enforcement agencies up to \$25,000 to prosecute anyone who forged or distributed phony tickets to his big show. The precautions worked fine; only six persons with fake tickets got into Boyle's Thirty Acres on Saturday, July 2, the day of the fight.

At nine o'clock that morning 5,000 persons were on line before the \$5.50 and \$10 ticket windows. Though Tex for forty-eight hours had been convinced that the gate would amount to over a million and a half dollars, he still fretted over the possibility of one of two things spoiling the fight—rain, or a first- or second-round knockout by Dempsey. After watching Carpentier train, Rickard had decided he had not a ghost of a show against the Manassa Mauler and planned to do something about it.

The elite started arriving at half-past eleven in the morning. They came in limousines, private railway cars, yachts, and chartered tugboats. A week before the fight every available seaworthy craft in New York Harbor had been hired to take fans across the Hudson to New Jersey. Dozens of special Independence Day weekend trains left New York's Pennsylvania Station hours behind schedule, because the private railway cars of such fight fans as Harry A. Sinclair and Edward L. Stettinius were routed through the Hudson Tunnels to Jersey City ahead of them.

Seven hundred and seventy-eight men were in the working press

section. Some had come from newspapers in cities as far away as Manila, Tokyo, Copenhagen to cover the bout. Major J. Andrew White, the pioneer radio announcer, was making the first broadcast of a fight. But he had to do it by reading his blow-by-blow description over a ringside telephone to an engineer in Hoboken, who repeated his account into a microphone there.

Irvin S. Cobb, whom the *New York Times* had hired to cover the fight, watched the handling of the crowds and pronounced Tex the world's greatest showman.

"Through a hundred entrances the multitude flows in steadily, smoothly, without jamming or confusion," wrote Cobb. "The trickling streams run down the aisles and are attracted by capillary attraction to the seats. If it takes all sorts to make up the world the world must be here already. . . .

"The arts, the sciences, the drama, commerce, politics, the bar, the great newly risen industry of bootlegging—all these have sent their pink, their pick and their perfection to grace this great occasion. A calling over of the names of the occupants of the more highly priced reservations would sound like reading the first hundred pages of *Who's Ballyhoo in America*."

Cobb was not exaggerating. In the audience at Boyle's Thirty Acres that day were three of Teddy Roosevelt's children—Kermit; Theodore, Jr., assistant secretary of the Navy; and their sister, Alice Roosevelt Longworth. A dozen Philadelphia Biddles were at the ringside, along with William H. Vanderbilt, several Rhinelanders, Paul D. Cravath, George H. Gould, Percy Rockefeller and his nephew, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Henry Ford, Harry Payne Whitney, George J. Gould, Joseph W. Harriman, Sailing Baruch, Vincent Astor, Robert L. Bacon, and George F. Baker, Jr.

And many officials from the embassies in Washington were there, including the Spanish Ambassador, Señor Don Juan Riano, with Mme. Riano; Prince Antoine Bibesco, the Rumanian Minister, and son-in-law of Herbert Asquith, ex-premier of Great Britain, with other members of the Rumanian Legation. Also W. H. Buford, the Netherlands chargé d'affairs; Henri Debach, counselor of the Russian Embassy; the Earl of Dundonald, special envoy from Great Britain to Peru, who was on his way to Lima; the ambassa-

dor from Peru, Señor De Pezet; Lee Samuels, member of British Parliament; Prince de Walder, Count Francis de Biron, Count and Countess de Cippio, Count and Countess de Grote, Sir Charles and Lady Sykes, and Sir Robert Jones of Liverpool.

And everyone in show business, of course. Al Jolson closed his show *Bombo* in Butte, Montana, to hurry east for the fight. In other ringside seats were Sam H. Harris, George M. Cohan, David Belasco, Edna Goodrich, Blanche Bates, Owen Moore, the movie star; and Colonel Jacob Ruppert, owner of the New York Yankees.

Sports writers estimated there were 2,000 women present, though Tex insisted there had been at least 5,000 of the girls there.

Mayor Frank Hague arrived at the arena at ten o'clock, and came back at 1:30 P.M. to discover newspaper photographers and others crowding around the ring. He had the aisles cleared by his police officers. Among those ejected was Tex's press agent, Ike Dorgan.

His Honor noticed that a high white canvas screen had been put up above the topmost row of seats on the south side of the arena for about 75 feet. He complained this blocked the view of patients in the city hospital nearby. Tex explained that it had been put up so pirate cameramen could not take movies of the fight from the hospital's roof. The canvas was removed on Hague's promise to station a policeman there to bar all but non-camera-bearing patients from the roof.

Meanwhile, the preliminaries were succeeding one another like clockwork, at half-hour intervals. They began with a four-rounder between Packy O'Gatty and Frankie Burns, bantamweights. As each pair of fighters left, two bigger boxers replaced them, with heavyweights in the semifinal.

"Look at all them fine people," Tex kept exclaiming in pure delight. "I never seed so many millionaires. Can you imagine all them fine people coming here to patronize Tex Rickard?"

It was a day crammed with thrills for him, but he never forgot an incident that happened during the preliminaries. While walking down to the ring, Tex was stopped by an usher who pointed out a gentleman a few rows back.

"He asked to see you, Mr. Rickard," explained the usher. "He says he can't see the ring at all from where he is sitting."



Tex walked over and almost swallowed his cigar. The gentleman was John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who apparently had bought his ticket from the wrong speculator. His seat was behind the platform supporting some horns that had been installed to carry Joe Humphreys' high-voltage voice to the uttermost reaches of the arena's six acres.

"I can't see a thing," John D., Jr., told Tex.

"I'll fix you up, Mr. Rockefeller," Tex said, and took the world's greatest philanthropist to an empty ringside seat he had been holding out for a friend.

It was the greatest day in Tex's life. Certainly it was the greatest day in Jersey City history. Everything else in town shut down as ring time for the big fight approached. A double-header between Jersey City and Newark was called off because the players had all gone to the big fight.

The arena's emergency hospital was kept busy throughout the afternoon. Twenty fans had to be treated for exhaustion. A psychopath in the \$10 seats became violent during the preliminaries. As he was being removed to the emergency hospital he bit an attendant and struck Dr. Frank Bortone on the jaw.

The mobs of people were still streaming in at 1:16 when it started to rain. The idea of all the celebrities present getting wet after they had honored him with their presence and enriched him with their money sickened Tex. But in a few moments the sun came out again, and a breeze from the west blew the storm clouds away.

"For me," he said later, with a great sigh, "that was a million-dollar breeze."

Weeks before, Tex had decided to ask Dempsey to carry Carpentier for a few rounds so the crowd wouldn't feel cheated. He kept thinking now of the day Jack had won the title. He had rushed over to the Secor Hotel to congratulate the new champion. And he had slammed Dempsey on the back as he told him:

"You sure are the best fighter I ever seed, son. Imagine a little feller like you knocking a big man like that all over the ring." Then he'd uttered one of his typical understatements: "Take care of yourself, son, and you'll have a big future in the fight business."

That threat of rain suggested to Tex an excuse for getting

Dempsey over to the arena ahead of time. He dispatched the police chief to Jack's hotel.

"Tex wants you over at the arena right away," the official told Dempsey. "He's afraid it might rain and is thinking of putting on the fight ahead of schedule."

Jack found the promoter waiting for him at the top of the stairs near the fighters' dressing rooms. Tex was chewing a cigar and nervously tapping on the planks with his cane. When Jack reached his side, Tex pointed with the cane to the enormous crowd stretched below them on Boyle's Thirty Acres.

"Look at that," he said. "That's the greatest thing that ever happened in boxing. It's the first million-dollar crowd, Jack, and you should have taken a percentage like I wanted you to, instead of a guarantee."

Dempsey just looked at him, waiting. Tex repeated, "Yes, sir, this is the first million-dollar crowd. And now let me tell you something. This Carpentier is a nice feller, but he can't fight. I could lick him myself. So I want you to be careful and not kill him."

Dempsey still didn't say anything. He was remembering Toledo when Rickard had worried about his being killed. "I meant that, Jack," Tex went on. "If you kill him all this will be ruined. Boxing will be dead."

Then Tex took a deep breath. "For my sake," he said, earnestly, "would you take it easy for the first few rounds? You won't have any trouble knocking him out. All I ask is that you shouldn't be in too much of a hurry about it. If you do what I say, son, there will be many more million-dollar gates and you and I will make a lot of money, working together like this. We'll *all* make a lot of money."

Dempsey nodded, then shrugged, without actually committing himself. Afterward Tex said that not knowing what Jack would do added to the thrill of watching the fight.

In view of a greater menace that hung over the 80,000 persons in the saucer-shaped arena that day, it was ironic that Tex should have been worried about rain, or the fight being too short, or even the danger of one of the planes that flew over the arena becoming disabled in mid-air and diving into the crowd. Tex never

knew until later about this other danger which could have cost the lives of thousands of his customers.

On the following day experts charged that the gigantic saucer had not been built strong enough to hold the weight of so many persons. But there was no hint of any structural fault during the preliminaries. The first warning of a possible catastrophe came when the crowd jumped to its feet to hail Carpentier as he entered the ring. Their excited shouts drowned out a brass band that was playing the Marseillaise.

At that moment the giant wooden saucer started swaying back and forth. A panic was avoided only because no one but those far back from the ring noticed it. But one man in a \$5.50 seat rushed forward yelling:

"Everybody stay down! You're in a dangerous place! The paraphernalia is wheeling! Everybody down!" Then he turned to the nearest police officer, and shouted, "If you police can't make them sit down, club them down!" His words froze with fear hundreds in the \$5.50 and \$10 seats who could see for themselves that the whole structure was swinging back and forth.

Gorgeous Georges had on a dove-gray bathrobe, decorated with black cuffs and edges. The twenty-seven-year-old challenger smiled and called gay greetings in French to friends around the ringside. In his corner were Descamps, Ledoux, Journée, and Gus Wilson.

Dempsey, who reached the ring eight minutes later, got a substantial, but much less hearty, reception. Each waited in his corner to hear Joe Humphreys introduce Mayor Hague, Governor Edwards, Tex Rickard, K.O. Bill Brennan, and many another celebrity and semi-celebrity.

Reporters at the ringside noticed that a huge wreath intended for Dempsey had been placed by mistake in Carpentier's corner. But when a sports writer asked Joe Humphreys if he thought this was a bad omen for the champion, the announcer shook his head.

"A lot of pallbearers usually go with them things," he said.

After being introduced, Tex settled down in the front row of his ringside box, next to John Ringling. Flo Ziegfeld was behind them, and also Harry Sinclair, the oil king; Big Bill Edwards, the former

football star and tax collector; and executive editor Herbert Bayard Swope, of the New York *World*.

Mr. Swope had assigned himself to cover the colorful side-lights. He, too, had high praise for Tex's production. Mr. Swope observed such small details as the cleanliness of the galvanized pails in the corners, and the newfangled seats for the fighters. These seats were attached to the posts on steel rods so they could be swung outside the ring as each round began.

The editor even examined the contents of the pails. He said that the Frenchman's contained a quart of still mineral water, a sponge, two lemons, and something "like collodion." He also wrote that Descamps chattered like a monkey before, during, and after the fight. Needless to say, Mr. Swope did not add to his account that this was scarcely the behavior expected of a man who most of the crowd hoped would hypnotize the formidable Dempsey.

Jack's face fell as Carpentier, 172 pounds, and he, 198 pounds, were introduced. The Frenchman received three times as mighty a reception. The referee was a New Jersey official, Harry Ertle, who lounged, resplendent in flannels and a soft shirt, on the ropes as the formalities were concluded.

During the introductions people in the \$5.50 sections continued rushing down the aisles. And as the second great roar went up for Carpentier, a man never identified cried out in a terrified voice:

"If it collapses two-thirds of all the people here will be smashed to bits. It should have been made of concrete and steel!"

But once again, with the great saucer swaying, a panic was avoided because of the very dimensions of the arena. Those close to the ring never knew what the excitement in the bleachers was all about.

And it was in this atmosphere, with many on the fringe of the great crowd fearing for their lives, that the two men came out of their corners. Dempsey came out slowly. Instead of bobbing and weaving as he sought an opening, he boxed warily, as though intent on testing out the Frenchman's punching power before he began to throw his own brand of dynamite.

Each time Carpentier got close Jack tied him up, using his 26-

pound weight advantage effectively. But if he seemed to be fighting Georges's fight, the Frenchman, for his part, appeared to have cast all caution to the winds in the hope of scoring a quick knock-out with a single blow.

Carpentier seemed in a frenzy, and once Jack, with a shove, pushed him halfway through the ropes. Just before the bell Dempsey drew first blood with a punch to the nose.

The second round began the same way, with Georges again not trying to outbox Dempsey but seemingly determined to slug toe to toe with him. And it is startling to recall how close Carpentier came to succeeding.

Experts said that Dempsey was easy to hit with a right. Now Georges proved it by landing a solid haymaker to the jaw that sent the champion rocking back on his heels and staggering against the ropes.

The crowd jumped to its feet mad with joy as the Frenchman followed up his advantage with another right to the head, and still another.

"You got him, Georges!" someone yelled. "You got him. Another right now! Let him have it, Georges!"

Out on the farthest reaches of the saucer they were yelling too, but not over the fight. Men hurled curses and warnings as the bowl swayed even more, subsiding only after the round ended.

The third began, and for a few seconds it looked as though it might be Carpentier's fight. But Jack was in a rage now. He was sorry that he'd listened to Tex's plea. He ran to the center of the ring at the bell, determined to put away the Frenchman. Jack missed with a swooping left, was smashed by two more rights, then began to hold.

After that it was all Dempsey. He kept crashing through the game Carpentier's defense, smashing at him, trying to crush him as one would some insolent little animal.

Whenever he landed, people around the ring gasped. It was as though the champion's terrific driving blows would go through Carpentier's body. Jack threw terrific lefts to the head in a row. Georges's eye was bleeding now. Jack ripped three more wallops through to the challenger's stomach, slowing him to a walk. At the

bell the only question was how long it would take for Dempsey to score the knockout.

Dempsey came out for the fourth like a torpedo, and throwing lefts and rights. Thirty-five seconds of jolts, then Carpentier was down with Harry Ertle swinging his arm over him. "... six, seven, eight, nine. . . ."

No one believed he could get up, but Gorgeous Georges managed it. Dempsey jumped like a cat. He appeared to be spraying leather at the Frenchman's chin, stomach, ear, and chin again. Now the Frenchman fell, this time cracking his head against the floor.

There was not a sound to be heard in the vast arena. It was almost as though Dempsey had hit each one of them. Georges did not get up. The saucer did not sway.

Many among the two thousand women fans appeared to be crying. The loser's seconds seemed bemused. Dempsey, though a fighter always reluctant to make the empty gestures of ring gallantry that wring applause from the crowd, stepped over to the semiconscious challenger, picked him up, and carried him to his corner.

The next day Tex announced that 77,328 had paid \$1,553,-422.15 to see the fight. He estimated that his own personal profit amounted to upward of \$400,000. The builders of the arena said that the fact that the arena had swayed without falling apart only proved how *well* it had been put together.

In the ten-round semi-final, Gene Tunney, a former United States Marine, knocked out Soldier Jones in the seventh round. It was an uninteresting fight and Tunney was criticized for having given a dull performance. No one suggested that one day he might develop into the cloud in Jack Dempsey's future.

# 15

**“And every two or three years a big one”**

IF EVER a sports promoter seemed to have jockeyed himself into an impregnable position, it was Tex Rickard as 1922 began. All of his big-league competition had disappeared. The elegant International Boxing Club was bankrupt. It had started an ornate clubhouse on Lexington Avenue, but ran out of money almost before the excavation work was finished.

But the Garden was making money. Most of its boxing and wrestling shows were sellouts. The six-day bicycle races that fall had drawn 125,000 fans. Basketball games were packing them in, every Saturday afternoon and evening. Tex had instituted Sunday night dances that had proved very popular. Though he still could not visualize professional hockey as a potential success, he was considering trying indoor tennis matches, and possibly a bloodless bullfight. His one failure had been a swimming pool he had experimented with during the summer.

In telling all this to interviewers, Tex expressed doubts that he would attempt to stage another million-dollar fight for at least two years. “Every two or three years for those big ones,” he said, “is about all the public will stand for.”

Less than three weeks after he painted this rosy picture of his and the Garden's future, Tex was arrested on charges of having had immoral relations with underage girls. Even his enemies—and he had accumulated quite a number of them since becoming the world's greatest sports promoter—confessed themselves astonished.

This, the greatest ordeal of Tex Rickard's life, began at 9 P.M. on Saturday, January 21, when two adolescent girls ran into Bellevue Hospital. They were crying and their clothes were torn.

They explained that they had been lured into a taxicab by a strange man at one o'clock that afternoon. While riding about the city in the taxicab in broad daylight, he had attempted to attack them, ripping their clothes when they resisted him. Later, to silence them, he had poured iodine down their throats.

Agents of the New York Children's Society were summoned. Before long they got the children to admit that they had made up the story about the man. They had ripped their own clothes, they said, and had gone to the authorities, hoping somehow to avoid punishment by their parents for staying out late on other nights.

When the agents continued to question them, the girls declared that they had been intimate with Tex Rickard during the previous summer. They first met him, they said, at the Garden swimming pool, and he had given them money to go up to his Tower office with him. They also named other teen-age girls, one of them only eleven years old, whom he had taken to the Tower for the same purpose.

With police detectives, the agents went to Madison Square Garden. Rickard was not there. He was out that evening with Mrs. Rickard, visiting friends. On returning late that evening to the six-room apartment at 80 Madison Avenue which they leased when he took over the Garden, Tex learned for the first time that the police wanted to talk to him.

He went immediately to the 35th Street police station with Edith Mac, who insisted on accompanying him. They both appeared thunderstruck on being informed of the nature of the charges. Tex's lawyer, J. Irving Lehman, was summoned, and the police released the promoter in the attorney's custody.

A few days later, Tex and Edith Mae sat side by side in the



West Side Magistrate's Court and heard Sally Nunes,\* a fifteen-year-old juvenile delinquent, give her account of what had happened on the day Tex took her and another girl up to his Tower offices.

Sally's story was interrupted by her mother. Mrs. Nunes, a domestic servant, jumped from her seat and ran down the aisle. "Your honor," gasped Mrs. Nunes to the judge, "please don't believe one word of what my little girl is saying. She is not telling the truth. She never had anything like that to do with Mr. Rickard, no matter what she tells you."

An attendant led Mrs. Nunes back to her seat in the courtroom, and the hearing continued. When it was over, Magistrate George W. Simpson held Rickard in \$10,000 bail for the Grand Jury.

Seven girls in all were eventually named in the case by the Children's Society. One of these children disappeared before the Grand Jury heard the case. A few days later she was found upstate in the company of a retired prize fighter who was indicted for abducting her.

A remarkable feature of the case was the staunch loyalty of Tex's wealthy and influential friends. Some of them wired from Alaska, South America, Nevada, and other places that they would travel around the earth, if necessary, to testify to his good character.

The goodhearted Maj. Anthony J. Drexel Biddle spent days on the phone calling the most influential men he knew in New York, begging them to assist him in frustrating what he was certain was a frame-up by Tex's enemies.

"Rickard is the finest and noblest sportsman I ever knew," said Biddle. "I consider him the world's greatest sportsman." Biddle said Tex had "purified" boxing since taking over the Garden, and added, "He is strait-laced in every respect, and the soul of honor."

The reaction among America's leading socialites had been different fifteen years before when scandalous allegations were made against Stanford White after the architect was shot by mad Harry Thaw. Some of his closest intimates had fled to Europe to

\* Because several of the girls involved in this morals case are now mothers—in two instances grandmothers—pseudonyms are used here instead of their real names.

avoid having to defend the architect who until then had often been called the best-loved man in New York. Needless to say, no reporters who covered the Rickard trial overlooked the coincidence of the Garden Tower's having also been the scene of White's wild parties.

A few days after the hearing in Magistrate's Court, a man who did not identify himself and seemed drunk telephoned Tex's apartment while he was out. He told Mrs. Myers, Rickard's mother-in-law, who answered the phone, that Tex had better hustle over to a saloon at the corner of Ninth Avenue and 39th Street.

"If he doesn't come," the man said, "he'll be sorry for the rest of his life. Tell him I said the place he'll be sorry in is a prison cell."

When Rickard got home he found Mrs. Myers and his wife, who was ill in bed, in tears. He laughed off the telephone call, saying New York was full of crazy people who called up men whose names they saw in the newspapers. Tex begged them not to worry about him, pointing out that he had handled with little trouble some of the world's toughest men in his Alaskan saloons.

Edith Mac wailed that New York was different, and that the saloon mentioned on the phone was in the toughest part of town, Hell's Kitchen. She insisted that Tex should go, but only in the company of a man from Val O'Farrel's Private Detective Agency, which was under contract to the Garden.

Reluctantly, Tex agreed. When the private eye arrived, he and Tex went to the designated corner. They found the man who had phoned waiting for them. He appeared to be still drunk, but produced the credentials of a Children's Society agent and demanded that Tex go inside with him while his companion waited outside.

Tex nodded, and was led to the rear room of the saloon where two other men, whom his guide introduced as his fellow agents, were seated at a table.

"All right, Rickard," said the man who had been outside. "We won't waste any time. We want fifty thousand dollars. For that we can guarantee to get you off the hook."

"What hook?" asked Tex. "You know I'm innocent of these charges." As he said this one of the men at the table got up and rushed out, exclaiming, "I want no part of this business."

"That may be so," the first agent told Tex. "But the stories these girls are telling will put you in prison just the same. Now for fifty thousand dollars, like I say, you can depend on us to get them to tell the truth."

Tex took a deep breath. He chewed on his cigar, took it out, looked at it, put it back in his mouth, and then looked at the agent who had been doing all of the talking, and finally at the one who had said nothing.

"All right, boys," he said then. "Here's the score. If like I say, I am innocent of those terrible things these little girls say I did to them, I want to stand up in court like a man, and prove that. If I'm guilty I should be sent to prison for life." And he added, "When I was a young feller in Texas, they used to hang men for doing such filthy, dirty tricks to children. To me, that is the one crime that deserves hanging. That's what I thought then. And, boys, one thing you can bet your last pair of shoes on: I ain't changed my opinion one bit since."

The two agents looked at each other. Then the man who had said nothing until then told Tex quietly, "It's only fair to tell you, Rickard, that we got a pretty good case rigged up against you. Also, if you take this attitude, we'll go through with it."

"Nothing I'd like better, boys. See you in court," said Tex. He walked out.

But if the threat did not intimidate Tex it convinced him that, as Mr. Lehman had been urging, he had better hire Max D. Steuer, one of the New York bar's most brilliant courtroom lawyers, to defend him.

On March 20, 1921, his trial on the charge of committing second-degree rape on the person of Gertrude Gorki, fifteen, began before Justice Isidore Wasservogel in the Criminal Branch of the New York State Supreme Court. Assisting Mr. Steuer in his defense were Mr. Lehman and Hyman Bushel. The most feared cross-examiner in the prosecutor's office, Chief Assistant District Attorney Ferdinand A. Pecora, was in charge of the prosecution.

The State requested, as the trial began, that the jury be locked up each night, a move usually made only when jury tampering or bribery is feared. Mr. Pecora also insisted that Tex be held without bail, meaning that the promoter would spend his nights in the

Tombs, New York City's gloomy old prison, until the trial was over. This so incensed friends of Rickard that they authorized Mr. Steuer to offer bail for Tex in any amount up to a half-million dollars, but Mr. Pecora refused to consider this.

The crime for which Tex had been indicted, second-degree rape, is statutory rape with the minor female's consent. Under New York State law sexual intercourse with a girl under eighteen years old is a felony punishable with imprisonment, regardless of her failure to resist the criminal act or of her own dissolute character.

Gertrude Gorki, who was fifteen, had not been involved in the case heard in Magistrate's Court. This indicated to reporters that Mr. Pecora now believed his best chance of convicting Tex was on her story. Like the other girls, Gertrude was a juvenile delinquent from a poverty-ridden slum home. One of the other girls involved had brought similar charges against another man which had been dismissed for lack of evidence. Several of the others also had been in trouble with the police because of thefts or immoral behavior.

But when Gertrude Gorki took the stand, she told a story that, if true, was damning indeed. Under Pecora's skillful guidance, Gertrude testified that she had been introduced to Rickard in front of the Garden one day in the fall by her eleven-year-old friend, Jennie Gilbert.

Tex accompanied them inside the Garden where workmen were putting up seats for a fight. While the other girl sat next to her, she testified, Rickard had fondled her breasts and taken other liberties with her. The workmen were only a few feet away, she said. Tex gave her and the younger girl seven dollars between them that day, and larger amounts on other days. On those other days, she said, he took her either to the Tower office or to an apartment on West 47th Street. In both places they indulged in sexual intercourse while Jennie Gilbert waited in another room. Mr. Pecora had Gertrude describe the office and apartment, which she did in considerable detail.

The State also brought out that the witness's brother some time before had been convicted of robbery in Wisconsin. Gertrude said she had brought her mother to ask Tex's help. Rickard, she said,

had given her mother five dollars and written to Tom S. Andrews, the Milwaukee boxing promoter, asking him to do what he could to help her brother.

The specific crime on which the State based its case was supposed to have occurred at the West 47th Street apartment on the afternoon of Saturday, November 12. On the previous day, Gertrude Gorki swore, she had seen Tex on the street outside the Garden and it was then that he made the date with her for the afternoon. Again, she said, she had gone to the West 47th Street apartment with Jennie Gilbert.

In January, after reading of Rickard's arrest, she and Jennie Gilbert had gone to his house to call on him. But seeing a switchboard in the lobby they telephoned him from a cigar-store booth instead of going in. Tex had his chauffeur pick them up. He got in the car a few blocks away, and drove with them through Central Park. At that time he begged them never to tell of their relations with him. When they promised, he gave them ten dollars each, got out of his car, a Cadillac, and told his chauffeur to drive them home.

Mr. Steuer's cross-examination of Gertrude brought out that though she slept in the same bed with her mother, she had never mentioned to her what Rickard had done to her. But she said she thought even his feeling her breasts was "a terrible thing."

However, the defense attorney was unable to get Gertrude to retract her charges against Rickard. He attacked her credibility by making her confess she had had a sex experience with a boy her own age. He also was unable to shake the younger girl's tale, though Jennie admitted under cross-examination that, young as she was, she had already committed burglary, stolen checks from a neighbor's mailbox, forged his name on them, and cashed them.

Mr. Steuer scored most effectively when he proved the girls could not have seen Tex outside the Garden on November 11. On that day there had been an American Legion mass meeting there. The crowd had overflowed into the streets all around it. No one without a ticket had been allowed to approach within blocks of the building. Neither girl had a ticket, they both admitted, or could remember seeing a crowd there. Mr. Steuer also proved that, con-

trary to their evidence, the apartment-house switchboard was not visible from the street. But when Mr. Pecora rested for the prosecution, he did not seem worried about his chances.

The defense opened by producing one of the Children's Society agents as a witness. The jury was asked to leave the courtroom while this man described the attempted \$50,000 shakedown of Rickard in the Hell's Kitchen saloon. Justice Wasservogel ruled that testimony inadmissible, and the case proceeded with George Lewis Rickard taking the stand in his own defense.

Later Tex said the trial was the blackest hour of his life. But on the stand Tex's calm did not betray his inner turmoil. He was dressed in a neat blue suit and had combed his few remaining strands of hair over his bald spot. Some of the reporters commented that they could not remember seeing him before without his hat on.

Mr. Steuer had Tex begin by telling his entire life story, including his childhood in Texas, the years as a prospector and gambler in the Yukon and later in Nome and Goldfield, his fight promotions and business adventures in South Africa and South America.

This was a brilliant maneuver. The people in the courtroom had the feeling that they were listening to a man who had lived through some of the world's most exciting modern history.

Without raising his voice Tex earnestly denied committing any of the acts of sexual intercourse the complaining witness had just described.

He explained that he knew many of the young boys and girls who had frequented his swimming pool that summer. He had often bought groups of them frankfurters and given them money to buy ice cream. But he certainly had never taken a young girl, or any woman, for that matter, up to his Tower office, a statement later confirmed by John Sullivan, the watchman and elevator operator, who had worked there for forty years.

Tex said he could recall visiting the apartment on West 47th Street only once, and this after the charges were brought against him. The apartment was the home of a Garden employee who kept for him there several hundred bottles of old whisky and wines which Tex had bought before Prohibition became law. On

learning that the agents had visited the apartment, Tex had gone there to see if they had disturbed his cache of booze. They had not even seen the prewar liquor stock though it was in cases plainly marked "R." It was surprising that the agents overlooked it while they were carefully itemizing the various pieces of furniture.

Steuer proved that the agents had taken one or more of the girls with them to the West 47th Street apartment—which was rented in a Garden employee's name—when they broke into it, looking for evidence.

The defense, of course, had kept pressing home the point that the agents' visit to the apartment with the delinquent girl was made to familiarize her with the furnishing there. This so she could coach the others about the layout of the rooms if they were called to testify.

The most impressive part of the defense came with the alibis Rickard offered for the various times the girls had sworn he was with them.

On the all-important Saturday afternoon of November 12 Tex said he was in a box at the Polo Grounds seeing the Dartmouth-Pennsylvania football game with his press agent, Ike Dorgan, his matchmaker, Frank Flournoy, and another Garden associate.

Each of these men corroborated this alibi, as did the Hearst sports columnist, Bill Farnsworth. When Mr. Pecora asked, "Did you speak to him at the game that day?" Farnsworth said, "No, but only because I didn't happen to be talking to Tex then. We'd had a quarrel some time before."

From the game Tex had gone home and had dinner with Edith Mae, his mother-in-law, the Flournoys, and Miss Helen G. Tillotson, a friend of Mrs. Rickard's. During the evening Dr. John M. Richards, who also happened to be Pecora's personal physician, had made a professional visit to Edith Mae. All these persons corroborated Tex's claim to having been at home that evening. Dr. Richards brought his appointment book to court as added evidence.

Asked what he was doing on the evening the girls said he had taken them riding in his Cadillac, Tex said, "I was with you, Mr. Steuer, that night."

In their stories that night most of the reporters covering the trial commented on the frankness and eagerness with which Rickard, whom they always had thought of as a tight-lipped man, had testified.

Next day, he also stood up stanchly during a two-hour grilling by the astute and adroit Mr. Pecora. Tex repeated that he had little doubt that he knew most of the girls who had frequented the Garden's swimming pool.

Tex became upset only once during the cross-examination: that was when Pecora asked him whether he had not been caught cheating while gambling at Hot Springs and other places. This brought an enraged denial from Rickard.

The promoter's worst moments on the stand came when Pecora's questions about the football game brought out that Tex could not describe the uniforms worn by either team, tell what a kickoff was, how long the periods were, and other elementary details. Tex tried to explain that it was the only football game he had ever seen.

"Why did you stay there for hours then?" asked the prosecutor.

"I was out in the air. I liked the noise and the crowd hollering. I was having a good time."

(Tex's ignorance about football astonished Mr. Pecora but no one who knew Rickard. Sometimes he could not name three of the current titleholders. The fact is that he could usually identify only the top heavyweights and such smaller fighters of quality and great class as Joe Lynch, Benny Leonard, and Lew Tendler.)

After Tex's chauffeur, Tom Murphy, testified that he had never seen his boss in the car with any other woman but Mrs. Rickard, Steuer paraded to the stand Rickard's character witnesses.

Charles E. Herron, who owned several Alaskan newspapers and canning plants, testified that he had known the defendant since 1900 and would trust him with anything—on his word alone.

Eugene F. Ailes, an official of the National City Bank in New York, explained that he had been a banker in Nome when Tex ran a gambling house there. "Mr. Rickard's name was good for whatever he wanted," he said, "and there were other businessmen there to whom we would not lend money if they offered twenty-dollar gold pieces for collateral."



Kermit Roosevelt, son of the late Teddy, described his and his father's meeting with Tex in South America. Mr. Roosevelt explained that he was now Rickard's partner in a chain of coffee-houses. He said he had such faith in him that he found it impossible to believe him guilty of the charges he was now facing. The Rickards and he and Mrs. Roosevelt, he added, exchanged social visits almost every week.

On being asked by Mr. Pecora if he did not think running a gambling house was a dishonorable profession, Kermit made the sort of answer his father was famous for.

"I would no more say a man who ran a gambling house is of bad character," he explained, "than I would say a man who runs a church is necessarily of good character."

Major Biddle topped all the others in his enthusiastic praise of Tex. The judge had to keep insisting that Biddle answer questions, instead of delivering flowery eulogies of the defendant.

Following brilliant summations by Mr. Pecora and Mr. Steuer, the jury retired. It returned in ten minutes with a verdict of "Not Guilty!" The roar of approval in the courtroom rattled the judge's inkwells, and the next day Tex received more than a hundred telegrams of congratulations.

At the time of his indictment Tex had turned over control of the Garden to John Ringling. Now Ringling and his other associates were clamoring for him to take over the reins again. Tex told them he reckoned he would take a vacation with Mrs. Rickard down in Bermuda for a while, and think it over, while considering the other fine offers he had received from other cities.

Privately, he told his friend Ringling that he had not the slightest intention of quitting his job at the Garden. "But don't say nothing to the other boys, John," he added. "Not knowing what's gonna happen when I get back will keep them on their toes."

Tex returned from his vacation looking healthier than ever, and he immediately took over the Garden. To many of his acquaintances, he appeared a man who had forgotten the trial the moment it was over. But Rex Beach did not think so. The popular novelist felt that Tex was a marked and changed man from then on. Pegler, who was seeing a good deal of Tex at the time, thought that Rickard brooded over the ugly and humiliating experience for

a while, then shook it off as he had every other tough time he had survived.

At the Garden, his problems seemed more complicated, though his main difficulty still was trying to anticipate and frustrate Doc Kearns's next move. Early in 1923 Doc saw a chance to leave Rickard out in the cold on the next Dempsey fight. This happened when Shelby, a cowtown in Montana, offered the champion \$300,000 to meet Tommy Gibbons of Minneapolis. Gibbons was a brilliant boxer but had no punch worth mentioning.

Along with almost everybody east of the Great Divide and in many places west of it, Doc had never heard of Shelby. But as soon as Rand McNally's local office assured Doc that there was actually such a place, he happily skipped over to Tex's office and told him about the offer.

"They are real serious about putting on a fight out there, Tex. Wanna up their offer?"

"I wouldn't pay a nickel for Jack in there with Tommy Gibbons," Tex replied.

Determined to show up Rickard, and overjoyed to get his hands on another fat bankroll so easily, Doc signed a deal for the Shelby fight. The two Jacks got \$100,000 down, with the balance to be paid later in two installments. Gibbons signed for 50 per cent of the gate receipts after their \$300,000 guarantee was paid.

The fifteen-round fight, held on July 4, was a triumph for Kearns and a financial disaster for everyone else. Doc managed to collect only about \$250,000, but in view of the fact that the fight drew only \$201,485 this still stands as an achievement unmatched even by such genuises at fast and furious sinagling as the late Max (Boo Boo) Hoff and the current Blinky Palermo.

Four Montana banks went out of business trying to get Doc the money he shrilly kept demanding. The merchants of Shelby went broke, and Tommy Gibbons, of course, got nothing.

The fight was one of Dempsey's poorest ones as a champion. During most of the time he could not catch up with the flashy and resourceful Gibbons. The press blamed Jack for that, and the public, which hated him already, said the looting of Shelby showed that the champ, besides being a dirty slacker, was as greedy and heartless as a pawnbroker.

But for the second time a wretched showing by Dempsey ironically provided the most wonderful build-up possible for the next fight Tex booked for him. This was with Luis Angel Firpo, the giant Argentine.

Firpo, who was 6 feet 3 and weighed 214, had arrived just the year before. He advertised himself as the heavyweight champion of South America. This came as a great surprise to many fans who did not know that professional boxing existed in such uncivilized parts of the world. But they were impressed by the story that Firpo had knocked out Gunboat Smith recently. As it turned out it was not *our* old Gunner at all, but a Negro fighter who used the same name. Firpo was matched to fight Sailor Maxted of Newark, New Jersey. Though he knocked out Maxted in seven rounds, the sports writers said Firpo was crude, wild, untrained, and they would consider it a personal favor if he went home very soon, making it unnecessary for them to watch him fight again.

Three things about Firpo, however, soon aroused widespread interest. They were his appetite, his frugality, and his business acumen. Luis was paid \$125 and a seven-pound steak for the Maxted fight. He woke up the butcher after the fight to get the steak, then cooked and ate the whole slab of meat within an hour of disposing of Maxted.

Though he could speak no English, Firpo managed to get movies taken of the battle, and later earned \$25,000 by showing the film of his great victory all over South America. He still has this money intact, it is said.

Firpo, a shaggy man with great, soulful eyes and a handsome face, was led into Tex Rickard's office by Al Mayer, the representative in the United States of *La Nación*, the leading newspaper of Buenos Aires. Hype Igoe, the sports writer, was with Tex at the time.

Tex's eyes lighted up when he saw Firpo, who looked even bigger and more muscular than he was because he was wearing a ten-dollar suit that was too small for him.

Later Igoe claimed he could almost see Tex's eyes working over the big fellow like a tailor with a tape measure.

"What a man!" he said later. "Why, boy, him and Dempsey will make the greatest fight you ever seed. That man is the nearest

thing to Jeffries in build I ever laid eyes on. I never seed such a neck on a man. Him and Dempsey will put on the greatest fight in the world."

Hype shook his head. "This time you're wrong, Tex. Don't you require anything in the way of boxing skill from a man before you match him with Dempsey for the heavyweight title?"

What it was about Firpo that excited him Tex could not explain. What his showman's eyes saw was a dramatic figure, a man who looked like a wild creature from some other world and had smoldering fire in his blood. Tex knew that if Firpo could learn to fight at all he would be a sensational attraction against Dempsey anywhere.

Instead of trying to explain, he said to Igoe what he often told sports writers when they doubted his hunches on box-office attractions: "Now up in my gambling house in Nome, Hype, we had five or six fellers working for us. All they did was order drinks, keep playing the wheel and the bank. We paid them five dollars a day because they boosted business. We never hired no knockers like you, though."

Firpo soon afterward went back to the Argentine. When he returned to the States for more bouts he was still a joke fighter to sports writers. Luis had limitless courage and determination. But he looked ludicrous as he rushed across the ring at his opponents and tried to club them down. Soon the boys nicknamed him "the Wild Bull of the Pampas."

But Firpo kept winning—in 1922 he scored seven straight knockouts. One of his victims was K.O. Bill Brennan. Another was Jess Willard, who was attempting a comeback. That fight was on July 12, 1923, just eight days after Dempsey's miserable exhibition in Shelby. The combination of the champion's bad showing and the triumph of Firpo in the battle of the giants made a Dempsey-Firpo match a five-star box-office attraction for Tex.

The fight took place on September 14, at the New York Polo Grounds, and packed that ball park to the bursting point. Just before Jack was to go into the ring Tex slipped into his dressing room.

"Will you do me the same favor that you did over in Jersey City?" he asked Jack. "We got another million-dollar gate. If you

put this poor dub away with the first punch all those people out there won't get their money's worth."

"There's one difference between this guy and Carpentier," said Dempsey. "Firpo is big and a slugger. He could kill me with one wallop."

"But, Jack, how is he gonna hit you? He's slow and moves like an old tub. I hate to think of all them nice millionaires going out of here sore at both of us."

"Go to hell," said Jack. He went out and toward the ring, determined to put away the Wild Bull of the Pampas as quickly as possible.

A deafening roar went up as the crowd caught the first glimpse of Dempsey. Fight fans always have to have a hero, and this time the Mauler was fighting a foreigner much bigger than himself and lacking Carpentier's gallic charm.

It was a huge crowd: 88,228 persons who had paid \$1,127,882 to get in, with \$27.50 the official price for ringside seats. And if any fight is worth a million dollars, that one was. The first round was probably the greatest three minutes of fighting in modern ring history.

James Crusinberry of the *Chicago Tribune* went much further. He called it "the greatest round of battling seen since the Silurian Age." But afterward nobody could agree about exactly what had happened, or in what order. Some said there were seven knock-downs. Some swore there were as many as ten. It was the carnage of Toledo all over again, except that this time the clumsy giant in there was determined to fight back.

At the bell for the first round, out came Dempsey, dancing in his bobbing, weaving manner, head down, swinging this way and that, looking, probing, and then throwing the leather. Firpo knocked him down.

Dempsey was quickly up again, and then Firpo was down. There had been a rule passed that during a knockdown the other fighter must go to a corner. Dempsey ignored it. He fought his man in the old way, standing over him, crouching, waiting only for him to get on his feet, then *wham!*

Up got Firpo, then he was down again with the referee counting over him. Three—six—nine. Always he came up and always he

was met by the hammer blows, the slugging fists. Sometimes when he fell on all fours he seemed to be crawling on the floor like some beast in a wild place who has lost his way. Once Dempsey had to step over him.

Again and again it looked as though Firpo could never get up before the toll of ten. But each time he made it.

Once he rose, snarling in his pain and fury, and drew back one great paw and let it fly. It caught Jack on the chin and drove him off his feet toward the ropes and through them. With both hands and feet in the air, he landed on the typewriter of Jack Lawrence, the sports reporter. As the referee started counting out the champion, Lawrence and the other sports writers nearby quickly shoved him up on the apron of the ring. Jack stepped through the ropes and put up his hands at "Seven!"

Being helped back should have disqualified him, but the referee, Johnny Gallagher, waved to both men to start fighting again. To save money, Firpo had hired cut-rate seconds, and now they cost him the title by not protesting.

Everybody agreed that in the last half-minute of that round he earned his title of Wild Bull of the Pampas. Lunging with wild rights and lefts like a madman, Firpo had the champ holding on at the bell. But when Dempsey slugged Firpo after the gong rang there was again no protest from Firpo's corner.

Between the first and second round the din from the crowd continued just as though the fight was still going on. It was almost impossible to hear the bell. But then they were in there. And Dempsey, with his head cleared, and stung as he had never been since his fights as a kid in the mining camps, tore out to finish it. Firpo was trying to sledge-hammer him to death. Jack quickly dropped him twice and then ducking a wild right of Firpo threw the left of his life. It dropped Firpo to his face on the floor. This time Dempsey the Killer did not crouch over him. He stepped to the nearest corner and leaned, breathing heavily, against the ropes and watched the great hairy machine of a man on the floor roll over, writhe in agonized pain, bleeding at the mouth, bleeding inside, trying to organize its muscles, then flopping back, a gone, tough-as-leather tiger.

Next day, and for many days afterward, there was savage

criticism in the press of the deplorable ring manners of Dempsey, and the referee, and endless discussion of just which newspaperman's typewriter Jack had landed on. They all claimed it had been theirs, even Frank Menke of International News Service, who wrote all of his stories in pencil.

# 16

## Did you ever see six hundred millionaires?

THE AMOUNT of personal publicity given Tex Rickard in 1925, the year he built the new Madison Square Garden, was the ultimate in flattery, when one recalls how many other public heroes were being created that year.

Balto, an Alaskan Husky dog, had statues built to him after he led his master's sled team to Nome with serum that prevented an epidemic. Floyd Collins died in a Kentucky cave and had dozens of folk songs written about him. John Thomas Scopes was hailed a martyr after he was convicted of teaching evolution to his pupils in the Dayton, Tennessee, high school.

Money, of course, was the most popular topic of conversation. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover was praised for saving America's businessmen \$500,000,000 annually, though what happened to all of that preserved money nobody, including Herbert, could say four years later, when the depression started.

Millionaires were being made every week, at least on paper. Down in Florida, where there was a land boom bigger than all of the country's gold rushes and previous land booms combined, they were being made every day.

But nobody could manufacture millionaires faster than Tex



Rickard. When asked who was bankrolling his new enterprise, he said, with a radiant light in his eyes, "My six hundred millionaires." He did have millionaires backing him, though only a half dozen of them. These six furnished Tex with \$5,000,000, or almost nine-tenths of the \$5,650,000 his new sports palace cost. Its location, on Eighth Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets, was more than a mile northwest of the old location, but Tex hauled the name uptown with him, for Auld Lang Syne and publicity purposes.

Richard F. Hoyt, of Hayden, Stone and Company, the investment house, headed the syndicate, which included G. H. Walker, Edward S. Moore, Matthew C. Brush, E. Roland Harriman, and W. Averill Harriman, the present Governor of New York. Tex raised the balance of the money by selling memberships in the Madison Square Garden Club for \$1,000 each. It was these subscribers, some of whom may not have been much more than thousandaires, whom Tex generously included as seven-figure men when he spoke so lovingly of his six hundred millionaires. John Ringling was elected chairman of the board of the corporation, and Tex became its president. Rickard's salary was \$30,000 a year and he was given a twenty-year contract. Tex almost exploded with rapture when the new plant's stock was put on the New York Stock Exchange's big board.

There had been no difficulty in canceling his deal with the New York Life Insurance Company, which built its skyscraper on the old site. And not even a grunt of disapproval came from either press or public.

Sports writers who visited Tex at the building site found him behaving like a ten-year-old with a No. 10 Erector Set. He was studying blueprints, climbing over girders, inspecting the bricklaying, cement mixing, riveting, and everything else that was going on. He was particularly proud of the endless miles of copper pipe which were to be laid under the arena floor.

Tex loved to explain how the pipes would speed up the freezing of ice needed for the hockey games he was adding as a regular feature. Also that the capacity of his new club would be 18,903 for fights; 15,500 for rodeos, the circus, and other shows that required the arena floor; and 14,500 for the six-day bicycle race.

Pounding the blue prints for emphasis, Tex said spectators would have a clear view of the arena from every seat in the house. The arena itself was elliptical in shape, had whorls of seats built on an incline from the floor, and two balconies.

Jimmy Dawson, the *New York Times* boxing expert, was astonished one day to hear Tex identify the new flooring as "something new, terrazzo." Dawson wrote later that Tex didn't know terrazzo from chenille, but that anyone talking to Rickard could not help being "infected with his enthusiasm, the excitement that lit up his gaze as, day by day, his magnificent dream approached completion."

Tex closed down the old Garden on May 5 with a fight card headed by Sid Terris and Johnny Dundee. Joe Humphreys did his best to bid the ancient structure a dignified farewell by reading some doggerel verses before introducing Terris and Dundee. Then, eyes cast down, and in the solemn voice of one speaking of his lost bride, Joe added:

"Before presenting the principals in this, the last contest in our beloved home, I wish to say that this marks the passing of this old arena that has stood the acid test these many years. Tonight we leave it for the last time. We mourn our loss and take with us fragrant memories."

As he paused, someone in the gallery shouted, "I can still smell them hot dogs, Joc."

Humphreys shouted back, "The more I hear from guys like you, the more I believe in birth control." Again dropping his voice to the low, reverent tone he considered more fitting for obsequies: "These memories will live forever in our hearts and minds. The great sport that made it stand out was boxing, and I want to pay my tribute now to Tex Rickard and others I met within these portals."

Before there could be any more vulgar comments, Joe hurriedly went on, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, in this corner, one of New York's own great East Side boys, Sid Terris, weight. . . ." The razing of the old Garden began the following morning.

When unveiled, the new Garden proved to be a purely utilitarian structure, and Tex had neglected to have made a big enough

entrance to the arena for Mr. Ringling's elephants to pass through, or enough dressing rooms. But every corner of the arena *was* visible from all seats, and it had a spacious front entrance, and a lobby where many professional gamblers have practically lived ever since.

Tex's new barn was a smashing success from the moment it opened in the last week of November with the six-day bicycle race. On December 15, seventeen thousand turned out for the first hockey game. The regular Friday night boxing show immediately became *the* place to go, if one wanted to be in the swim with Mayor Walker, Texas Guinan, Peggy Hopkins Joyce, Arnold Rothstein, and Tex's other six hundred millionaires.

Once again Tex was making a tremendous score. And now it was his luck to be operating in the lushest, wildest-spending time ever known and also at a time when there were magnificent champions in every field of amateur and professional sports—Johnnie Weissmuller, Gertrude Ederle, Suzanne Lenglen, Helen Wills, Glenna Collett, Babe Ruth, Paavo Nurmi, Jack Dempsey, Bill Tilden, Red Grange (who turned professional that year), and the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame.

Though Dempsey was married to Estelle Taylor and too busy acting in Hollywood to fight that year, the championships in the other weight divisions changed hands no less than eight times during 1925. One titleholder, world flyweight champion Pancho Villa, a savage, hard-hooking, whirlwind Filipino scrapper, died in the summer of blood poisoning, the result of neglecting an infected tooth.

Dozens of good small men were in action, but most of the thrilling bouts were between the bigger fellows. Some of these boys were characters so colorful they now seem fabulous creatures of some faraway time.

Jimmie Slattery, a brilliant, fleet-footed boxer, was so vain that he boxed with both hands dangling at his sides. Tiger Flowers, a Negro church deacon from Georgia, fought twenty-five main bouts that year. Before each one he prayed for divine help in his dressing room. But the help did not always come, for the Tiger was knocked out twice that year by Jack Delaney. Delaney himself was an unusual chap to find in the ring, being a wood

chopper out of the Canadian forests, whose real name was Ovila Chapdelaine.

Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom, the ring's clown prince, outdid himself that year. Going to Cleveland to fight Harry Greb, Slapsie was robbed by gangsters who met his train. On leaving the fight club, after being paid off, he was met by the same mob, who robbed him again.

"But they weren't such bad guys," Maxie philosophized. "They left me a double sawbuck so I could eat and tip good on the train going home."

Battling Siki, the Singular Senegalese, who was born in the African jungle, was also around. He lived in Hell's Kitchen with a white woman, walked the streets with a wineskin over his shoulder, and got into a bad habit of taking taxicabs all over town. At the end of the ride, Siki would often suggest to the driver that they fight for the fare. "If I win, you get nothing," he said. "If I lose, you get double." The Singular Senegalese was found dead in a Hell's Kitchen gutter on December 15, 1925. The neighbors said, "Poor feller took one double-or-nothing taxi ride too many."

Paolino Uzcudon, the picturesque Basque sheepherder from the Pyrenees, was still fighting in Europe. Meanwhile, Harry Greb and Mickey Walker were delighting the public, but horrifying their managers, by occasionally battling on the streets. They were good friends, but loved to fight one another so much they couldn't always wait to get into a ring.

Jack Sharkey, the Lithuanian heavyweight, had the curious habit of bursting into tears each time he won a fight. Young Stribling was the son of a circus acrobat and a strong woman who trained him from birth for ring greatness. Harry Wills, a giant Negro, each year went on a starvation diet for an entire month. Gene Tunney, the fighting Marine, was said to be studying Shakespeare.

Recently a fight manager, pointing out how many foreigners were fighting over here in the mid-twenties, said, "The government never should have threw a chill on immigration."

These fighters, eccentric and otherwise, had managers who demanded top prices for them, sometimes more than even Tex cared

to pay. Rickard brought them down to earth, when the negotiations reached an impasse, with a little trick that showed he had not forgotten the hypnotic effect heaps of gold had on everybody at Goldfield.

Pretending to be searching for a match, Tex would open the top drawer of his desk. The drawer was stuffed with banknotes, yellowbacks, greenbacks, good American money in all denominations.

"I pay off in cash, boys," he would say, "whenever a man wants it that way. And in case you fellers need dough for training expenses—well, you can walk right out of here with that today. That's, of course, if we can agree on terms."

Invariably the trick worked. Tex had the additional psychological advantage of sitting at an eye-popping solid bronze desk which had originally belonged to President Harding during these negotiations. The chair Tex used was made of horn and had been presented to him by a troupe of rodeo performers. He always wore his Stetson and kept his gold-headed cane hooked over his arm even while in his office.

Whenever a man is written about on so vast a scale as Tex Rickard was, the suspicion invariably arises that his public personality has been either created or reshaped by the newspapers. Many celebrities of show business and politics have obligingly adjusted their personalities to fit their press notices until they became something quite different from the people they started out to be. Not infrequently they have been transformed into caricatures of themselves.

Some of the men who knew Tex thought this started to happen to him about 1925. They later discovered that he was still the same guy Rex Beach had admired for his toughness, and Wilson Mizner for his levelheadedness in a jam. In fact, the gold-headed cane that was part of the Tex Rickard trade-mark was several times broken over the heads of men whose money demands he found too much to bear. And he didn't care where he was when he blew his top. More than once the assault occurred in the lobby of the new Garden where Tex so loved to stand watching the crowds come in.

Paul Gallico once wrote of Jack Dempsey that "nothing went to his head." And this is the extraordinary truth also about Dempsey's friend, George Lewis Rickard. The vistas never stopped widening for Tex. Again and again and again he discovered that there were great new areas of knowledge and experience that he had not known existed. But he stood there, unchanged, holding his own, maintaining his poker face, keeping his own counsel as the fellow at the top must always do if he expects to stay there. And if the old cowboy was once intimidated, nobody knew it.

And this, perhaps, is the most difficult thing Tex Rickard, who had never gone beyond the third grade, ever had to do: remain unchanged after hitting great jackpots—and dry holes—in Henrietta, Dawson, Nome, Seattle, South Africa, South America, Goldfield, Reno, Toledo, Jersey City, and New York.

His most glittering accomplishment was dragging to his doorstep the people of the great upperworld he wished to rub shoulders with. Though he realized he could never truly be a part of their world, he made them come to him on his terms!

Only a handful of men in each generation have the genius, the power, and the Napoleonic generalship to create around themselves the world they wish to live in.

Tex was one of them.

Rickard always regretted deeply that Edith Mae was not there to share with him the glitter and the glory of the new Garden's opening. She died a few weeks before, on October 30, of the heart ailment from which she had long suffered. Tex was at her side, holding her hand.

The newspapers gave her death only a couple of paragraphs, but Tex knew that Edith Mae would not have minded. Always, from San Francisco to the jungles of Paraguay, from the tragedy of losing their baby to the more recent hell in the New York courtroom, she had wished only to be allowed to walk at his side.

Edith Mac, who had been the perfect hostess whether the Roosevelts, the Biddles, or rough, tough fight guys came to dinner, had asked but one thing of him—that if she died first, he take care of her mother. During all the years she had been ill she

had worried that the old lady would be left in want after she died. When Tex's will was made public, it was discovered he had not forgotten. Mrs. Myers was among those provided for.

Tex worked at the new Garden from fourteen to twenty hours a day, but his continued success only seemed to increase his problems. The chief problem was his never-ending dispute with the New York State Athletic Commission. The unctuousness of James A. Farley, who had succeeded William A. Muldoon as chairman, pleased Tex no better than had the blunt manner of the "Old Roman," as ex-wrestler and trainer Muldoon was called. The many blunders, both verbal and tactical, of the boxing commissioners, had caused Bill McGeehan to nickname them the "Three Dumb Dukes." But King Solomon, Einstein, and Thomas Jefferson could easily have been stumped by their job of regulating the fight industry.

There was, for example, the problem of the Negro heavyweight Harry Wills, the so-called Black Panther, Dempsey's most persistent challenger. The commission, being political appointees, were subject to orders from Albany. And their orders were to insist that Tex match Dempsey with Wills. That pleased thousands of Negro voters in New York.

But the orders were countermanded each time Tex and the two Jacks agreed to give Wills his title shot.

This was because the state authorities feared that another mixed heavyweight title match might be followed by race riots more extensive than in 1910, with the Democratic administration in Albany getting the blame. So the politicians, being politicians, played both ends against the middle—and Tex Rickard was the middle.

What infuriated him was that he had turned over the old Garden free of charge to the Democrats for their 1924 National Convention, even throwing in the concessions as an extra contribution. And that convention had turned out to be the longest since the founding of the Republic.

"So why don't they take *that* into consideration," Tex would yell, "instead of making me the goat in this Harry Wills business? Them fellers in Albany are playing me for a sucker, all the way down the line. They're crucifying me in the eyes of the public!"

What he said made sense. What the politicians had to do—play both ends alternately to keep their voters deluded and happy—made just as much sense, from their point of view. And it seems now quite likely that another mixed heavyweight title fight in the mid-twenties could have killed boxing in New York.

The dilemma was solved when Gene Tunney became a logical contender, following his knockouts of Tommy Gibbons, who had stood off Dempsey, and Bartley Madden, whom Wills had been unable to put away.

Finally, Gene defeated Johnny Risko, a Cleveland baker who was so round and firmly packed that he was called the rubber man. Never a title contender himself, Risko was famous chiefly as a "spoiler" who wrecked the chances of many bright-eyed heavyweight hopefuls on the way up. But Tunney beat him by a big margin, in twelve rounds.

Rickard did not think much of Gene as a drawing card, but could not deny that he had earned the right to fight Dempsey.

If the New York boxing commissioners agreed with him, they would not admit it. They continued to insist Wills get first chance at Jack. So Tex sounded out the chances of putting the Dempsey-Tunney fight on in Chicago, though he eventually picked Philadelphia.

Tex may have had some notion that he would escape the endless complications of his other major hassle with the Three Dumb Dukes by going to Philadelphia. This running battle concerned the manner in which Tex was managing—or mismanaging—his ticket distribution. If there were any Machiavellis in this dispute, their names were Mike Jacobs and George Lewis Rickard.

Jacobs had been advancing huge sums to Rickard whenever he needed money. In return Tex permitted the ticket speculator to take over the control of the first nineteen rows of seats at all sports events at the Garden and also at his big outdoor fights.

Through his own agency Jacobs sold as many of these eagerly sought pasteboards as he could. The others he passed on to rival speculators for a premium of several dollars each above the amount stamped on the ticket. Of this extra money, called "ice" by the happy conspirators, Jacobs kicked back between 15 and 20 per cent to Rickard, personally.

It was a wonderful deal for both of them. The other brokers



were permitted to return the unsold tickets to the Garden box office, but got back only the face value, not the \$1 to \$10 in "ice" they had paid Jacobs on each pasteboard.

The honest Tex suffered no more qualms at taking this money than does a traveling salesman when he pads his expense account. Before and after each big Rickard fight there were howls that the scalpers—as the disapproving press called the speculators—were getting up to \$100 for ringside seats.

"So who cares?" Mike Jacobs asked Tex. "This will make the suckers who only pay \$50 for your \$27.50 seats feel they are getting a bargain." And Jacobs proved an excellent crystal gazer on that one.

The "ice" arrangement also permitted Rickard to pay off politicians, fight managers, and others who had done him favors, in a more refined and exposure-proof way than previously was possible. Tex merely had to hand such a man a batch of choice tickets, informing him he was selling them to him at the regular price. All the favored one then had to do was to walk to the nearest speculator's office, collect the ice, with the speculator sending over to the Garden the face value of the tickets.

Nevertheless, for other reasons the ticket situation continued a nightmare. When Tex moved into the new Garden he did not realize he would have the same problem with underworld rowdies that he had to solve down at the old barn on the Square. There, gangs of East Side mugs and mobsters had been in the habit of rushing the turnstiles and taking the best seats they saw. The customers who bought those seats often got sluggish if they made any objection.

Tex had cured them of their bad manners by hiring huskies of his own and arming them with blackjacks. At the new Garden he found himself on the fringe of Hell's Kitchen, where, instead of the East Side Jewish and Italian rowdies, the West Side Irish sluggers and slum-bummies crashed his gates. They did this in bunches, overwhelming the men at the turnstiles by sheer manpower and ferocity. In their turtleneck sweaters they would then swagger down the aisles and grab ringside seats for themselves, intimidating the ushers with homemade blackjacks, handy-size lengths of iron pipe, and store-bought brass knuckles. When Tex's beloved

carriage trade arrived to claim its expensive seats, the Hell's Kitchen boys would start free-for-alls.

It did not take Rickard long to quell the new group of underworld gate crashers. The backbone of his forces was a corps of fierce, fearless, and incorruptible private policemen equipped with bigger muscles, blackjacks, and brass knuckles than the Hell's Kitchen bully boys.

In addition to eliminating all unseemly rowdyism he had also found a way to cope with the guileful tricks of professional gate crashers.

Tex liked to boast of how he had made it impossible for anybody to get into the Garden now without a ticket. One Friday fight night he described his system to a group of men who gathered around him in the lobby. When he finished, one of them, a steamship company official, Capt. Charles W. Randall, asked, "Tex, would you bet me a thousand dollars that I can't crash the Garden without a ticket?"

"When?" asked Tex, his eyes narrowing.

"Tonight. Right now."

"You got yourself a bet, Skipper," said Tex in great contentment.

Captain Randall had noticed that a uniformed gateman about twelve feet away had seen him talking to the promoter. Approaching this man he asked, quietly, "Isn't your name Donovan?"

"No, sir, it's Flaherty."

Randall nodded, then: "How long have you been with us, Flaherty?"

"Six years, sir."

"And what do we pay you?"

"Twenty-five dollars a week."

Randall again looked thoughtful, then shook his head. "I've been watching you work, Flaherty, and twenty-five isn't enough. I'm going to make it thirty-five, beginning next week."

The guard could scarcely find words to express his thanks as he let Captain Randall through the turnstile. Five minutes later, Randall jauntily sauntered out to the lobby again and collected his \$1,000 bet from the red-faced promoter.

Tex Rickard summoned Flaherty to his private office for a talk

the next day. It ended with Tex giving the employee, whose error had cost him \$1,000 and much embarrassment, the ten-dollar-a-week raise Captain Randall had promised.

Among the few who did not like Tex, some will tell you he was a remote and cold-blooded man. But he was never so distant from the poverty of his youth that he could not understand what a domestic crisis that poor Flaherty would face if he had to go home and tell Mrs. Flaherty that the ten-dollar raise she had been so happy about was merely the joke of some stranger.

Sports writers also often contributed to Tex's ticket nightmare by giving their working-press seats away to friends in bars, or even to strangers. They then would go around to the Garden and demand entrance of the turnstile keeper. When the man at the gate was new on the job there was sometimes trouble. A few sports writers Tex kept on his payroll. But the best of the sports writers, he had learned, wouldn't take money or other gifts and refused to let him cut them in on the ice. But they did not mind drinking his liquor, or even getting extra free tickets for their friends.

As might have been expected, the twenties, the Golden Age of Sports, quickly developed Homers to record the mighty feats of the decade's idolized athletes. Only lately, however, is it becoming clear what a truly inspired lot these writers were. Most of them were men who caroused wildly and recklessly, drank heavily, and at times became so playful and mischievous that they drove Tex Rickard and sport's other businessmen to the brink of seething frustration.

But the score they made as writers is today marked down plainly for all to see. Among them were Ring Lardner, Damon Runyon, Heywood Broun, W. O. McGeehan, Grantland Rice, Westbrook Pegler, Bill Corum, Gene Fowler, Quentin Reynolds, Paul Gallico, John Kieran, and Bugs Baer. And for that matter most of today's best sports writers, including Red Smith, Dan Parker, Tom Meany, Jimmy Cannon, and John Lardner, got their basic training during the twenties. So did Jimmy Powers, the leading TV fight broadcaster, and Ed Sullivan.

From time to time, one or another of these gifted men pressed

Tex to make a stand against handing over money to political chislers and fixers.

"You're big enough now, Tex," the sports writers kept telling him, "to take them on and beat their brains out." They could not comprehend why Tex, so basically honest himself, would traffic with such grafters. Sometimes, weary of the discussion, Tex would blandly deny that he was paying bribes to anyone.

But it was never true, anywhere that he put on a big show. There always was the give-up in the big cities—in New York, Philadelphia, Jersey City, Chicago—just as he'd been squeezed by the same sort of men in San Francisco.

A few days before the Dempsey-Firpo fight, Tex was shaken down for \$83,000 in cash by men who said that unless this money was paid, his license at the Polo Grounds would be canceled. In Jersey City it had been \$50,000 for steel that never got near Boyle's Thirty Acres.

Tex could not possibly have explained why paying huge sums in graft to men he despised was of secondary importance to him. Perhaps he never understood himself, in so many words, at any rate, that putting on the show was what mattered most to him—all that mattered. For Tex would have put on a big fight for nothing, just as Al Jolson would have sung in an alley or Bob Hope would tell jokes on the street corner, if no one cared to pay them to do their stuff in theaters.

Tex was attracted to Philadelphia by the \$3,000,000 Sesqui-centennial Stadium which had more than 100,000 seats. But he ran into the same old troubles there. The only difference was that they came from another set of people. The Pennsylvania Boxing Commission was just as eager to run his business as the one in New York. There were the same anguished yelps about scalpers getting \$100 for ringside tickets marked \$27.50.

One novel aspect of this fight was the wholehearted manner in which everyone seemed to be suing everyone else. Since Tex entered the fight game he had lived in a hailstorm of lawsuits. One Western couple had even sued him for the cost of their vacation in New York because they were unable to get in to see

the Dempsey-Firpo brawl. They claimed they had come to town just to see the fight, but Rickard's lawyer won the case when he proved the plaintiffs had sneaked into the Paramount Theater and other of New York's amusement places.

At Philadelphia there was a blizzard of lawsuits. Doc Kearns was head suer, the chief object of his disaffection being his old pal and partner, Dempsey. Jack had shucked off Kearns some time before because Doc couldn't get along with his new wife, Estelle Taylor. To their mutual friends Doc confided that he would not have minded Estelle so much if it had not been for her sense of humor. He seemed to think that making wisecracks was pretty presumptuous of a mere female.

Doc kept throwing lawsuits at Dempsey until he had the champion half crazy. Once, on hearing a process-server was approaching, Dempsey went through a beaverboard wall to escape.

Dempsey moaned, "Every time I hit a punching bag one of Doc's summonses falls out of it." Kearns even had Jack's Rolls-Royce seized while Estelle was riding in it. The beautiful movie star had to get out and walk miles back to her hotel that day. Doc's lawsuits didn't help Jack to get into shape any faster. Their chief objective, of course, was to tie up Jack's entire purse.

Tex was certain that the champion would once again prove invincible. He told newspapermen before the fight that he only hoped Jack would let Tunney stay a few rounds before knocking him out. On the day of the fight Tex raged like a wild man on hearing that Gene was flying in from his training camp. It was only a short hop, but in 1926 any flight at all seemed a dangerous adventure to most Americans.

The gate was another all-time record breaker, the attendance being 120,747 and the gate receipts \$1,895,723. But that night something happened that Tex had dreaded for years—a rainstorm that drenched the crowd, and knocked out the press wires.

The fight proved almost as dreary as the weather. Dempsey, the great man-killer, never seemed able to get going. On the other hand, Tunney had spent several years figuring out just how he would beat Jack when he finally faced him in the ring. He had decided that defensive boxing—letting Jack do all the leading, and countering with his right—was the proper combination.

It was a brilliant achievement, carrying out this theory. But it was also a depressing spectacle to watch. A fine boxer, Gene was not a flashy one. He made no mistakes this night. He never accepted the challenge to step in and mix with Dempsey.

"I knew Dempsey would nail me if I did," he said afterward, quite frankly.

So it went, for ten rounds. Tunney, faster, in better condition, ducked, countered with his right, got away, and continued to let the champion do all of the leading.

Dempsey, who hadn't fought in three years, was rusty, and looked it. His punch was gone, and he had no speed at all. After the first few rounds he was a mass of bruises, for Tunney kept hitting him hard. But Tunney was unable to knock out Jack, or even knock him down. In the last round Gene had both of Dempsey's eyes closed. When the final bell rang it was obvious that the great Mauler could not have lasted through an additional round.

When the announcer proclaimed Tunney the winner and new champion, Dempsey, unable to see anything, said to his seconds, "Lead me out to him. I want to shake his hand." It was the first time in ring history that the world heavyweight title had changed hands on a victory scored on points. But no one could possibly say that Tunney did not deserve the victory and the title. Least of all Dempsey, who declared right after the fight, "I was beaten by a better man."

As he came into the ring Jack had been booed by the men and women who had paid \$1,895,728 to see the battle. But when it was over, the crowd sat as though dazed and depressed. Many in that vast multitude had never seen a prize fight before. But all of them realized they had just seen the passing of the greatest ringman of the generation. And it had been like watching a tiger of a man trapped and destroyed by an energetic, good-looking, clean-living scoutmaster.

After the fight Tex Rickard sat on a couch in a hotel suite, surrounded by sports writers. "I can hardly believe it," Tex murmured in a forlorn voice. "I never thought it could happen to him."

"What are you going to do now?" he was asked.

"I dunno," Tex said. "This other feller ain't never been a drawing card. Dempsey was the one who drew 'em in."

"Well, what about a return match?"

Tex thought of the cruel beating he had watched Jack take. After a while he said, "No-o. I don't think so. I wouldn't want to put him through it again."

Estelle Taylor had not gone to the fight, and when Dempsey returned to his hotel suite that night she looked at his black-and-blue face and burst into tears.

"What happened?" she asked.

Jack shrugged, and said, "Honey, I guess I forgot to duck."

When this story was published the public began to wonder whether they had undervalued Jack Dempsey, the man who stopped at nothing to win, but could lose like a champion. If so, it seemed too late, because within twenty-four hours Jack announced his retirement from the ring.

Tunney was paid \$200,000, Jack, \$711,868, for the fight. For all the papers Doc Kearns threw at Dempsey he got nothing but bills from his lawyers. However, Jack made a final settlement with Kearns a couple of years later.

Doc had bet over \$50,000 on Dempsey to win by a knockout. "I guess the laugh is on me," he told reporters, "if anyone can scare up a laugh this morning. To think I buried my personal feelings to bet on Dempsey certainly looks like a joke, but somehow it don't appeal to me."

At that time Kearns still felt certain that his lawyers would have no difficulty in tying up Jack's paycheck, which was to be turned over to him that day.

But the lawyers came back empty-handed. The day before the fight Tex Rickard had gone down to the Western Union telegraph office with a suitcase containing Jack's \$711,868. He wired the money to the champion's brother, Joe Dempsey, in California. Joe stowed it away in a bank vault where Doc and his lawyers were unable to locate it, much less attach it.

"I'll get that hick sonofabitch from Texas yet," said poor Doc. "He has crossed me up for the last time."

# 17

## The grand finale

WITH HIS \$200,000 paycheck in his pocket, Gene Tunney, the new world heavyweight champion, went home to New York. He was given one of Mayor Walker's citywide ovations and no one ever more deserved that honor than Gene, a good-looking, curly-haired chap. Boxing is a dirty game, and Tunney, then twenty-eight, was the finest and most high-principled man who ever rose to the top of its heap of heavyweights.

There had been little money in his family and he had grown up, far over on the West Side, in a tough section of Greenwich Village. As a boy Gene had steered clear of the roughneck kids in the street gangs. He had gone as far in Catholic schools as he could, then got himself a job as a clerk. When the United States entered World War I, Tunney enlisted in the Marines, and made a fine record for himself, besides winning the light heavyweight championship of the American Expeditionary Force.

Gene had boxed some as a boy. He took up boxing as his profession after the war only because it promised to pay better than any office job he could get. But he had to fight for four years without being defeated before fans paid much attention to him. They remained unimpressed when Gene took the American light heavy-



weight championship from Battling Levinsky, outboxing that old ring cutie for twelve rounds. That was in 1922.

Oddly enough, Tunney first won a real following after a defeat. This was at the hands of Harry Greb. In fifteen hurly-burly, rough-house rounds Greb broke Gene's nose, butted and gouged him, thumbed his eyes bloody, and kned him. Greb, the Pittsburgh Windmill, always had the ring manners of a billygoat.

"Get Greb for me again as soon as you can," said the battered Tunney to his manager, Billy Gibson, in his dressing room after that fight. "I've figured out how to beat him."

During the next three years Tunney met the foul-fighting Greb four times. He won each bout, though the last two were no-decision affairs. After the final one, Greb, who was game enough to take on a jungle cat (he once offered to work as Dempsey's sparring partner without pay), walked into Gene's dressing room, held out his hand, and said, "I've had enough of you, Gene. Let the other guys fight you. I want no part of you from now on."

But Tunney was never a popular fighter in any real sense. Only boxing experts found him interesting as a ring performer, and while champion he became almost as unpopular as Dempsey had been, though for different reasons.

Gene abhorred the chiselers and crooks who infest the fight business. Neither was he amused by the horseplay, card playing, and general hell-raising that was so much a part of the other champs' training camps. All that represented to him was the seamy, vulgar side of life he had known so well as a boy, and wished to forget.

Though Tunney loved books he did not get along well with most of the hard-drinking, happy-go-lucky sports writers. The sort of writing that interested him was not the sort they did. Also, he was moody, and the brightest of the newspapermen seldom could figure him out.

Practically everything Tunney did or said, as champion, offended a large part of the public. The hero-worshippers of the United States have always insisted that their idols act as though nothing had changed in them or their lives, no matter how famous and wealthy they become. The celebrity is expected to remain modest

and appear bewildered that great fortune has caught up with him. Above all, he must pretend that the whole thing was pure luck.

Gene was incapable of pretending any such thing. Though never a conceited man, he knew that what he had accomplished was his own doing, and in no way due to luck or publicity breaks.

But Gene's romance with the pretty Polly Lauder, a society girl, was one event in his life that greatly pleased even his critics. They applauded the way he waited to make a couple of million dollars of his own before marrying Polly, who was heiress to a great fortune. What the mob resented was the manner in which Gene permitted wealthy people to take him over as though he were some new and amusing toy.

Carpentier's hobnobbing with the upper classes had been acceptable, partly because he was a foreigner, partly because of his gay smile and wink which indicated he didn't take any of his millionaire buddy-pals very seriously. But Gene could not disguise his gratification at being taken up by the upper classes, as they were then still being called.

And later, when Gene lectured at an Ivy League college on Shakespeare, and held intellectual conversations with George Bernard Shaw, and was asked by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* editor to write their article on boxing, the sports writers went out of their way to ridicule him.

Needless to say, none of this would have hurt attendance at Gene's bouts if he had been half the walking melodrama in the ring that Dempsey had been. But Gene lacked the color and the flair, the explosive fire, the love of battle and the knockout punch of the man he had beaten so badly at Philadelphia.

Yet, as world heavyweight champion, Tunney held the key to Tex Rickard's future, and both of them knew it.

Throughout Tex's last years his fantastic luck stayed with him. Shortly after the Philadelphia fight, he married a vivacious and pretty Broadway actress, Maxine Hodges. She was twenty-four and he fifty-five. Before long she had talked Tex into having a good time, instead of working morning to night, seven days a week.

Partly to please Maxine, Tex bought Walter Chrysler's high-

powered yacht, and had a whale of a time racing it up and down the Hudson. Tex also bought a handsome home on one of the lagoons near Miami. He took more time off to play golf, a game he had discovered not too long before. For a man his age, he was pretty good, and cracked 100 most of the time.

Tex was, at last, living it up. And his joy was without end when Maxine had a baby girl, whom they named Maxine Texas. The child was the decoration and the pride of Rickard's existence from the morning she was born.

Meanwhile, things spun along in top style at the new Garden. And in 1927, Tex put on not one, but two million-dollar fights. The first of these was a nontitle bout at Yankee Stadium on July 21, between Jack Dempsey and Jack Sharkey, the Mauler being in there again because he needed money. The attendance was a magnificent testimonial to the hold on fans of the long-detested Dempsey, now that he was ex-champ. Many of them also thought it might be their last opportunity to see the Manassa Mauler in action. And it would have been, if he had lost to Sharkey. The take that night was \$1,083,529.

Tunney had proved at Philadelphia how far over the hill Dempsey had gone. An athlete's legs weaken first, and on the night he lost his title Jack's seconds had to start massaging his pins as early as the third round.

At the Stadium Sharkey seemed to be playing Gene's smart game, standing off the Mauler at long range, outspeeding and out-punching him. That went on for six rounds. Dempsey just didn't seem to have it any more.

But in the seventh, Jack Sharkey, a highly emotional and unpredictable man, tripped over his ego. He stepped in to mix it up with the worn-out old champ. Dempsey concentrated his fire on Sharkey's belt line, hitting him low at least twice. Some ring-siders charged that the Mauler got in four solid wallops below the belt.

Though not badly hurt, Sharkey then committed a fatal error. He turned his head to complain to the referee, Jack O'Sullivan, of Jack's low blows. Dempsey threw a whale of a hook at Sharkey's jaw. The next thing anybody knew, O'Sullivan was leaning over the gabby Lithuanian, counting him out.

The controversy over this incident roared on for weeks. Sharkey and his manager appealed to the Boxing Commission to reverse O'Sullivan's decision, and declare him the winner on a foul. The commissioners decided against setting any such precedent.

"It would mean two winners in every fight from now on," declared Chairman Jim Farley, holding his head, and shuddering.

The real stake of the Yankee Stadium fight had been a title fight. And nothing could have delighted Rickard more than having Dempsey, who had collaborated with him in four previous million-dollar gates, a principal in another title go. Tunney was playing a vaudeville date in St. Louis when the time came to sign the papers. Tex drew widespread attention to the bout by chartering a special train to go there for that important ceremony.

The second Dempsey-Tunney fight went on at the vast Soldiers Field in Chicago, on September 22, 1927, just a day less than a year after their first battle. Because the Illinois boxing law stipulated that only local citizens could promote bouts there, Tex took in George Getz, a Chicago coal merchant, as his co-promoter.

The battle drew 104,903 spectators, 15,000 less than at Philadelphia. But the \$40 top allowed at Chicago resulted in the greatest gate of all time, an unbelievable \$2,658,000. Tunney's purse, \$990,000, was the largest ever paid any fighter, and Dempsey's \$450,000 the most ever given a challenger.

Governors, cabinet ministers, and a reputed 2,000 millionaires had seen the first Dempsey-Tunney fight, not to mention thousands of women. But there were even more celebrities, high-ranking politicians, diplomats, and industrial giants at the return match. And it was this once again, even more than the gross receipts of his own profit, that most pleased Rickard. To Hype Igoe he said exultantly:

"Kid, if the earth came up and the sky came down and wiped out my first ten rows it would be the end of everything. Because I've got in those ten rows all the world's wealth, all the world's big men, all the world's brains and production talent. Just in them ten rows, kid. And you and me never seed nothing like it."

The odds on the first bout had favored Dempsey at from 3½ to 1 to 11 to 5. In the rematch the men went into the ring at even money. Except for the Johnson-Jeffries fight, it was the only

time a heavyweight champion had not been installed as the favorite.

The bout itself, except for a single incident in the seventh round, was a repetition of the Philadelphia scrap. That incident, of course, was the matter of the long count. During that never-to-be-forgotten seventh Dempsey managed to catch up with the aggravatingly cautious Tunney and brought him to the canvas with two smashing left hooks to the jaw, followed by a right.

Dempsey stood over Tunney, as he had over Firpo. But Referee Dave Barry, a local official, instead of picking up the timekeeper's count, ordered Jack to a corner. Whole seconds were lost before Dempsey obeyed, and the counting was resumed. How many seconds is still being debated. But the important thing is that there was time enough for Tunney's head to clear. Gene was waiting for "nine" on one knee before Barry tolled off "five." And at the count of "nine," Gene got up, and backpedaled for dear life, with Jack after him like a bill collector.

But that was the end of the excitement. Jack, being in better shape than the year before, landed more often and more effectively. But again Tunney was far ahead of him on points at the end.

After the fight Jack again announced his retirement.

Tex didn't like that. "With Jack in action," he said, "the boxing game was fun. Now it's just a business." Rickard refused to attend the big party Bernard Gimbel, the department-store magnate, was throwing for Tunney in the Hotel Sherman. Benny Leonard said to him in the Sherman lobby, "Tex, why don't you go upstairs? They're all celebrating."

"Celebrating what?" demanded Rickard bitterly, as he turned on his heel and walked out into the street.

He was not overjoyed later when Gene told him that he would consider risking his title against Tom Heeney, a New Zealander, for a substantial sum, say a half-million dollars or so.

Tex complained that Heeney, who had fought a draw with Jack Sharkey at the Garden, was no drawing card at all. For one thing Heeney's stand-up style was tailor-made for the champion, and everyone knew it. Rickard asserted that Sharkey would draw much better against him.

Gene just shrugged. Being a gambler, Tex put on the match

with Heeney anyway at Yankee Stadium. It was stopped by Referee Eddie Forbes after Tunney had made a chopping block of the New Zealander for eleven one-sided rounds.

A week before the fight it had become clear, from the advance sale, that Rickard was going to lose a big roll on this one. The fight drew 45,890 fans, however, and grossed \$691,014. Tex and the Garden came up with \$152,000 in red ink, mostly due to the \$500,000 guarantee to the champion. There were rumors that Gene had offered to refund some of the money. Rickard was supposed to have replied hotly to this that he didn't do business that way. Earlier in the year Tex also lost a bundle on a bout between World Lightweight Champion Sammy Mandell and Jimmie McLarnin.

For months before that, Tex's associates had shown signs of being eager to put the skids under him. In January, after he went to Miami for a vacation, they had fired Frank Flournoy and other employee-friends of his in an economy campaign that they said would save the corporation \$100,000 a year.

Under Rickard's direction the Garden's stock had paid a \$1 dividend the year before, and in 1928 it would pay \$1.75, and have its \$2,250,000 mortgage reduced to \$1,800,000.

The animosity of some of his associates might have been aroused either by the continuous publicity Tex was getting or his cruelty in not cutting them in on the ice.

Meanwhile Tex's name was in the papers more than ever. One day he was reported about to replace the wooden arena at Boyle's Thirty Acres with a steel stadium. Another day it was an auto-racing track he was planning to put there. He had a "Tex Rickard Exploration Company" searching for oil in Guatemala. He had offered \$2,500,000, he said, for 51 per cent interest in the New York Giants Baseball Club. There were more news stories when Tex was invited to supervise the seating arrangements at the 1928 Democratic National Convention in June.

The big loss on the Tunney-Heeney bout increased the opposition to Rickard's regime at the Garden. And the men who opposed him had a big point as soon as a single Rickard project lost important money. For Tex worked on his own, and impulsively, calling all shots by himself, consulting no one, and tolerating no

interference. The executive who does that can afford to make no errors of judgment. When Tex became convinced his associates no longer approved of the way he was running things, he told them:

"The hell with you! If you want to squeeze me out, I'll make it easy for you boys. I'll quit."

But his contract had some time to run, and it was not announced that Tex and the Garden were to part company. With Maxine, the little girl, and Jack Dempsey, Tex went down to Miami to put on the Sharkey-Stribling fight for the Garden Corporation. Dempsey was to act as his co-promoter. Tex had also talked Jack into promising to meet the winner of this fight.

Tex was not in Florida for very long before his imagination was captivated by the idea of establishing an American Monte Carlo at Miami. His plans included the most luxurious gambling casino ever seen anywhere, a dog- and a horse-racing track, a hotel and a sports arena.

On January 2, Tex's fifty-eighth birthday, he was stricken with a stomach pain. The first doctor summoned called it indigestion. When the pain continued, Mrs. Rickard rushed Tex to a hospital where specialists diagnosed his ailment as a gangrenous infection of the appendix. It was later learned that Tex had been warned to have an appendix operation twenty-seven years before, in Nome. But Rickard, who would bet on anything else, for years had refused to gamble on a surgeon's skill.

After four days' illness Tex Rickard died on January 6. Following his extraordinary funeral at Madison Square Garden he was buried, beside Edith Mae and his daughter Bessie, in Woodlawn Cemetery, in The Bronx.

In Houston just seven months before, reporters had become curious about Tex's assets after his reported \$2,500,000 offer for 51 per cent of the New York Giants. One of them asked him if he had \$2,500,000.

"I suppose I have about that much," said Tex. "And I keep about a million of it lying around in cash in New York banks so I'll always have plenty of money on hand in case some gilt-edged investment comes up."

A story in the *New York Times* on May 23, 1933, revealed, however, that Tex had left an estate of only \$453,223 gross and \$166,662 net. This meant that bequests in his will had to be reduced by more than 60 per cent. Debts amounted to \$199,551, and funeral and administration expenses to \$80,860. The bulk of the shrunken estate, as Rickard had directed, went to his widow, daughter, mother, mother-in-law, and other relatives.

No matter how long one searches, part of the character of Tex Rickard remains a mystery. And this, in a way, is maddening, because it is refreshing to borrow the excitement that was part of the Tex who never grew up, and to admire the side of him that was all courage and solid rock.

The clearest, cleanest clue to what Rickard really was lies, of course, in that childhood of his. It must have made every morning that dawned afterward seem to him like Christmas in some warm and hospitable land.

This lack of a proper childhood, incidentally, one can find in the lives of all the great showmen, different though they are from one another in all else. Something in the childhood of each is missing. One great showman may have lost his childhood in the theater, another because there was so seldom enough food in the house, the others because their fathers were drunkards or their mothers sluts.

Whatever the cause, the showman grew up, learning what he did directly from life. None of it was sieved, as with the rest of us, through the screen of someone else's mind—a parent's, a teacher's, or an adored family friend's.

And so the showman emerged from childhood clutching something new and peculiarly his own, a version of life, or a vision of what it might be, to sell and to share with the world.

What Tex Rickard had to sell and to share was violence—as a toy.

There was much talk about a great monument to be built to the memory of George Lewis Rickard at Woodlawn. It never materialized. An athletic stadium named in his honor at Henrietta, Texas, finally was constructed in 1952.



But behind him Tex Rickard, that enigmatic, closemouthed man who walked always in such dignity through an undignified and disorderly world, left something more impressive than a great fortune or a stone monument.

Even today, almost thirty years after his death, one rarely steps into the always fantastic and dizzy world of boxing without hearing the hard-shelled old-timers talking about Tex with a love and a reverence they reserve for nobody else.

And everywhere you go in the country it is the same. The Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* sports writer Portus Baxter, now old and wrinkled, sits day after day in his rose garden at Three Tree Point, Washington, overlooking the breeze-spanked waters of Puget Sound. He has done a lot of living, has Portus, and seen hundreds of the great men of sports come and go. But after all these years he can recall every word Tex said to him in Reno on those exciting summer days back in 1910 when there were daily rumors that the reformers would force the Nevada authorities to ban the Jeffries-Johnson fight.

"With all that money on the line, Tex Rickard never blinked," says Portus. "I never saw a man more cool, with his whole future at stake. Great man, Tex, maybe the greatest I ever knew."

In New York many in the cigar-smoking, dead-eyed gang at Stillman's Gym, on Jacobs' asphalt beach, the Forrest Hotel, in Jack Dempsey's restaurant, or in Madison Square Garden itself, talk in much the same way about Tex.

"He was my friend," says Jack Dempsey. "His eyes were his bond."

In Philadelphia, in Lew Tendler's restaurant and around Harry Pegg's house where he prints his unique magazine, *The Veteran Boxer*, it is the same story.

In Miami the old fighters sit in the sun on the porches of little homes bought with the money they managed to save from their ring earnings. They too talk almost every day about Tex, the nights they worked for him, and how he could always be trusted.

These men with broken faces and flapjack ears are unusually gentle, often humble. It is as though they had fought all of the fury out of themselves back there in the great ring days of their youth.

The other old fighters have never stopped talking about Tex, and what he did for the game, whether they are sitting in their houses, or in any grimy fight gym from Portland, Oregon, down to New Orleans, and up again to Portland, Maine. They talk often of Tex in Sheriff Tom Gibbons's office in St. Paul, and in the Sportsman's Café in downtown Los Angeles, where Buddy Taylor, the ex-bantam champion, works as a Good-time-Charlie greeter and host.

From the Sportsman's Café you can get to Hollywood in a half hour or less, and find Frank Moran, now a stunt man in pictures, at his regular post in front of the big drugstore at Hollywood and Vine. Frank, still freckled and standing straight as a king, tells you a dozen little tales about his encounters with Tex in London, Paris, and New York.

A few blocks away lives Tommy Farmer, who managed Manuel Ortiz and many another good one out on the Coast. In back of his house he has fixed up a club for the old-timers who are still around, with trophies, boxing gloves, and albums of pictures of battles of a half century ago. The old-timers sit there arguing by the hour about such things as how many rounds Corbett went with Tom Sharkey that night at Coney Island; how many inches deep the snow was when Joe Gans fought Kid Herman on that blizzard-cursed day at Tonopah, Nevada, in 1907; what this or that one weighed against little Tommy Burns, whether four-ounce gloves were used in that fight, and so on.

And wherever they are, the broken old faces of those who fought for Rickard light up when you ask them about him, the gambler-promoter who lifted their sport of boxing out of the gutter and always paid what he said he would pay them, and always in full the day after the fight. And after you listen to their favorite statistics, if you ask them if there is anything else they remember about Tex, anything special, they say:

"No, nothing special." Because, like Rickard, they are not word guys at all, and never were.

Tex, of course, would have reveled in knowing he is still a bright high spot in so many old fighters' memories.

It is as big a monument as any man ever had.

Just the same, he might have valued equally the praise written

after the funeral by his most censorious and persistent critic, W. O. McGeehan.

"For an out-and-out gambler he probably was the greatest success of his age. There probably never will be one like him, for luck gave him the cards and he knew how to play them."

Because that, more than anything, was what Tex was, and what he had wanted to be ever since that day back in the Klondike, when he watched Sam Bonnifield deal faro for the first time.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Samuels was born and educated in Brooklyn. In his own words, he has had more jobs than anyone since Benjamin Franklin. Until he was twenty, he worked as office boy, errand boy, stock clerk in a lace house, messenger for an insurance company, assistant to a shipping clerk in a secondhand plumbing concern, and ad checker in an advertising agency. He ended this phase of his career as a rubber stamp salesman.

As for newspaper work, he was a sports writer, strawberry-festival expert, and feature writer on the *Brooklyn Eagle*; police reporter on the *Brooklyn Daily Times*; and waterfront reporter on the *Miami Tribune*. Later (1930 to 1934) he was New York editor of the Central Press Association, also an associate editor of King Features Syndicate. He also did a long stretch as a police reporter in Brownsville, where Murder, Inc., was hatched for a news association, and a short stretch on rewrite for the City News Association.

Mr. Samuels has also been a press agent for movie companies, a Coney Island gas company, a pageant, and a Florida land-boom corporation. (How Mr. Samuels worked in this extravagant enterprise with Ben Hecht, J. P. McEvoy, and Walter O'Keefe is told in Ben Hecht's autobiography, *A Child of the Century*.)

In Hollywood Charles Samuels has worked for three different movie companies, and in New York he has done jobs at various times for film companies. For a year and a half he was city editor of Paramount News. He has also sold original stories to movie companies, including his book on the Harry K. Thaw murder case, *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing*.

About another facet of his career Mr. Samuels says: "My best jobs have always been as a protégé. I have been the protégé of Ben Hecht, Gene Fowler, and the late Charles MacArthur. I only quit as Hecht's protégé when I realized I was the oldest protégé since Biblical times." He also worked as a leg man for Ben Hecht's column in *PM* and for Billy Rose's column.

As a free-lance writer Mr. Samuels has been more than prolific. He has written about 900 magazine articles and a few short stories, which have been published in every kind of magazine. At his children's request he once wrote a short story for their favorite comic magazine. He has also ghosted for murderesses, surgeons, waitresses, garage mechanics, and others who wished to "tell all." As a result of this work and the books he has written with and for others he considers himself a "literary ventriloquist."

Louise Bronaugh Samuels, his wife, is a former *Time* researcher.



